



# *Persian Fairy Tales*

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SOMAIYA PUBLICATIONS PVT LTD  
BOMBAY

1941 By ELEANOR BROCKETT

Printed by S. N. Tavkar at Somaiya Publications Pvt. Ltd.  
(Printing Unit), Wadala Udyog Bhavan, Bombay 31, and published  
by G. B. Newalkar for Somaiya Publications Pvt. Ltd., Bombay 14

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author acknowledges her indebtedness to the work of the late Ella C. Sykes which provided the basis for the legends retold from the "Shah Nameh" of Firdausi, and to the collection of Eastern folklore by W. A. Clouston and the translations from the Kermani and Bakhtiari by D. L. R. and E. O. Lorimer for most of the folk-tales and fairy-tales.

## SOURCES

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- A Group of Eastern Romances and Stories from the Persian, Tamil and Urdu*. Introduction, Notes and Appendix by W. A. Clouston. (Privately Printed, Glasgow, 1889.)
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## I

# The Gardener and the Little Bird

ONCE upon a time in the city of Balkh there lived a rich man who had a beautiful garden. This garden was quite fairylike in its loveliness. There were many different kinds of sweet-smelling plants, flowers like the flowers of paradise and trees which in season were laden with delicious fruits.

A mischievous little bird was attracted to this beautiful garden and he amused himself by picking off the fruit, whether it was ripe or not, and letting it fall upon the ground.

The gardener who tended this beautiful garden was sorely grieved whenever he saw the fruit lying on the ground and realised the damage that was being done. His heart, usually uplifted with joy whenever he looked upon the garden for which he cared, was filled with sorrow. He wrung his hands and wailed and complained. Oh, how he did complain. But he soon came to realize that wailing and complaining would not change matters. If the damage was to be brought to an end the culprit must be caught.

So the gardener spread a net in the haunts of the bird, hid himself in the undergrowth and waited silently. Before long, to his intense joy, he saw that

the mischievous bird had been imprisoned in the net. He leapt from his hiding place, grasped the bird in one hand and made ready speedily to kill it with the other. But before he had had time to bring its fluttering, mischievous life to an end, the little bird fixed his little eyes upon him and addressed him thus :

"Oh, man!" he said. "You fine, clever, intelligent creature, listen to me. May heaven's favours always be showered upon you. May your good wishes always be granted!"

The gardener was greatly pleased and flattered by these words. His anger abated and his hold on the little bird loosened somewhat.

"Reflect," continued the little bird, "that if you kill me, I shall be the one who benefits. Your loss can never be repaired but I shall be removed from earthly cares for ever. Remember, too, that patience is always to be commended: hastiness is always foolish. I love life and I want to live. You think I have done wrong and if you want to you can kill me, but first allow me to say a few words."

The gardener, definitely impressed, said grandly:

"I will indeed allow you to say a few words before you die."

"Away to the west," began the little bird, "there is an oasis. That is where my family lives. I left my relatives to come here. This garden attracted me, it is so beautiful. For a time I sat on the branch of a tree. I observed a lapwing and a nightingale, sitting together at the top of a date palm. There was a locust flying about and both wanted to catch it. It was the nightingale who succeeded. He caught the locust. But the lapwing snatched the locust back from the nightingale's beak. 'Oh, shame upon you, lapwing,' said the nightingale, 'catch your own game, do not rob me of mine!'

"'Nonsense!' replied the lapwing. 'For the hunter to catch his prey is nothing. But to deprive the hunter

of his prize, that is something !' You may be right, said the nightingale, agreeably. 'I will give up the locust to you. But now that we have met, let us talk of other matters. I have heard so much about you from the other birds. It was a lapwing, was it not, that brought King Solomon news of the City of Sheba? How were you lapwings rewarded for this and other services?' The lapwing replied: 'King Solomon granted our species a threefold reward. First, we have the gift of being able to tell at what depth water can be found under the surface of the earth. Secondly we wear on our heads the crest of nobility. And thirdly, we know the qualities of fruits. For instance we know that this garden has had a visitation and that this year all who eat of its fruit shall immediately die.' Then the lapwing asked the nightingale whether his species had also been favoured with special gifts; to which the nightingale replied that his species too had been thrice favoured. The nightingale had been given a pleasing, melodious voice, the characteristic of being awake during the night (a characteristic also of religious men) and great beauty of form and colour.

"Oh man," continued the little bird, "you most clever and intelligent of creatures, most skilful of gardeners, when I overheard what the lapwing said to the nightingale I set myself the task of plucking the fruits quickly and casting them to the ground lest men should eat of them and come to some harm."

The gardener, already flattered and impressed by the little bird, now began to feel positively indebted to him.

"Now," continued the little bird, well in control of the situation, "if you will promise to set me free I will present you with three maxims. These maxims will give you the key to happiness in this world and the next and will win you the regard of your fellow-men."

## PERSIAN FAIRY TALES



The gardener, already flattered and impressed by the little bird, now began to feel positively indebted to him.

“Proceed, I am all ears,” said the gardener.

“Right,” said the little bird. “Maxim One: Never trust anyone of doubtful character. Maxim Two: Never believe impossibilities. Maxim Three: Have no regrets about things which cannot be changed.”

The gardener accordingly let go of the little bird and it flew away. But it did not fly far and, after circling around a few times, it alighted once more in a branch of a tree within speaking distance of the gardener.

“Oh foolish gardener,” piped the little bird, stretching its neck impudently. “If only you knew how I have deceived you!”

“What *do* you mean?” asked the gardener.

“Well,” said the little bird, “inside my body is a gem the size of a duck’s egg; indeed it is of such size

and beauty as to defy all imagining. Just think, if you had killed me this jewel would have been yours. You would have had riches to last you a lifetime."

The gardener when he heard this felt he was going to die of mortification. He felt confused and bewildered and so angry with himself he could have killed himself there and then. He caught hold of his robe and tore it from top to bottom and scattered ashes upon his head. When he had somewhat recovered his composure his first thought was to recapture the little bird. He stretched out both his hands leapt and plunged in an effort to grasp him. But the little bird easily eluded the gardener and finally perched on a high branch well out of reach. There he sat and laughed at the foolish man.

"Ha! ha!" chuckled the little bird. "I have been clever enough to escape from your clutches once; do not imagine that I am going to let you catch me a second time."

The gardener moaned with grief, tears came into his eyes. He wept. But the little bird went on jeering:

"How can you call yourself a man, you silly creature? Only this moment I gave you three excellent maxims, all of which you have already forgotten. One: Never trust anyone of doubtful character. You believed every word I said and set me free. Two: Never believe impossibilities. Can you really imagine that a little bird like me could possibly have a gem the size of a duck's egg inside him? Three: Have no regrets about things that cannot be changed. And look at you now, rending your robes and lamenting."

With that the little bird flew away and disappeared out of sight.



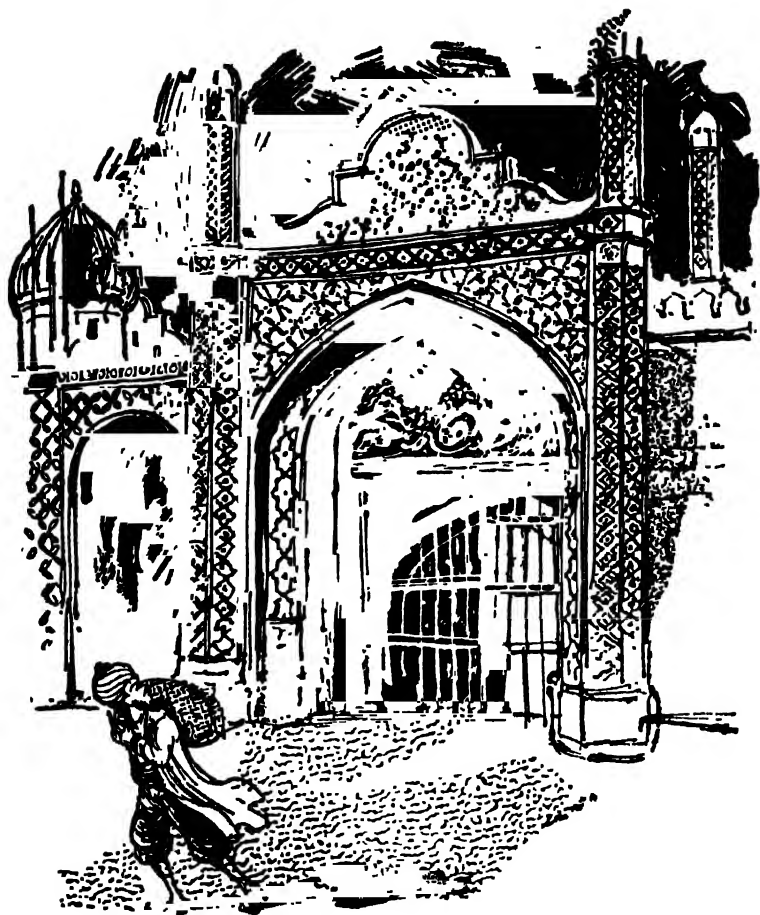
## II

### The Hidden Treasure

ONCE upon a time there lived in Damascus a man called Zayn al-Arab. He was a poor man and he had to struggle hard to keep his family from hunger. Every loaf of bread was gained by him with much anxiety. He worked so hard he was always tired and had no thought for the joys and pleasures of life. Even when things became easier for him he did not know how to stop working and therefore for the first time in his life money began to accumulate. When he had saved a considerable sum he could hardly believe his good fortune. That is how he felt about it although he had worked hard for every penny. Fortune had never smiled kindly upon him and he feared she might yet play unkind tricks upon him. He rejoiced in this unfamiliar feeling of prosperity but was at the same time full of fears that he might suddenly lose his wealth.

He decided what he must do. He must hide his money where no man would ever find it. One night, when all the city of Damascus was sleeping and no one could see him or follow him, he stole out beyond the walls and buried his treasure under a tree. He took good care that he remembered which tree it was

## THE HIDDEN TREASURE



One night, when all the City of Damascus was sleeping, he stole out beyond the walls.

and stole home again, still under cover of night and feeling much relieved in spirit.

This feeling of relief and satisfaction, however, lasted only a few days. He began to miss his treasure. He wanted to see his money again and count it and so confirm this wonderful, delicious feeling he had

had that he was no longer a poor man who had to struggle and strive for the next loaf of bread to give his family. He decided that he must go and see his treasure. So once more he stole out of the city at night so that no one could see him or follow him. He remembered every detail of the tree where his treasure was buried and went straight to it, his heart full of joyous anticipation. He knelt on the ground, sunk his hands into the loose soil and with a song in his heart scratched the earth away. He scratched deeper and deeper. He then stood and looked once more at the tree. Yes it *was* the tree. But his treasure had gone. Someone had been there and taken it. But how? But why? How could anyone have known that his treasure lay buried under this tree?

Suddenly the world, which had begun to seem to him a kindly place where he could enjoy his prosperity and take his ease a little, seemed once more harsh and cruel. More cruel than ever, in fact. His heart was scorched with bitterness and chagrin. All serenity was gone. There was an end to peace of mind.

Zayn al-Arab did not know what to do or to whom to turn. If he would search for his treasure where was he to begin? In whom could he confide? He spent his days in perplexity and bewilderment and deep, deep sorrow.

One day Zayn al-Arab went on business to a very wise and learned man of the city. He had known him for many years and could really count him as a friend. "I will not enquire how you are," said the wise and learned man, "for I have noticed of late that your health has not been good. You are sadly changed, my friend. Will you not tell me what has happened? Will you not confide in me what is troubling you?"

At this show of kindness and care for him tears came into Zayn al-Arab's eyes.

"Oh dear and loving friend," he cried, "a strange and terrible thing has happened to me. I am bowed

down by a most cruel misfortune which I cannot explain. My heart is heavy with sorrow. But what does it avail if I tell all my troubles to you? It can only mean that you too will be plunged into the depths of grief."

But the wise and learned man encouraged Zayn al-Arab to open his heart and speak his mind. "It is right," he said, "that friends should confide in each other. I knew without your telling me that some sadness was weighing heavily upon you. Why not tell me all the facts and it may be that together we can think of some way of overcoming your difficulties."

"Dear friend," said Zayn al-Arab, "after years of toil and hardship I had at last some gold. My joy in ownership was matched by my fear that it might be taken from me by thieves. I therefore carried it out of the city by night and buried it under a tree, marking well under which tree my treasure was hidden. But when I next visited the spot I found my treasure gone. Thieves had robbed me even so."

The wise and learned man listened attentively and pondered.

"This is indeed a serious matter," he said. "And it will be difficult to trace your gold. It seems probable that someone was watching you when you buried it and came along after you and took it away. God sees and knows everything and the thief will have to account for his actions in the next world. That, however, may be small comfort to you. Give me ten days," he continued, "and I will give the matter my deep consideration."

The wise and learned man spent ten days in contemplation. He turned over many plans in his mind but none of them seemed likely to succeed. On the tenth day he met Zayn al-Arab in the street.

"My friend," he said, "I have given these ten days to considering your plight. My thoughts have plunged into the realms of possibility like a diver

plunging into the sea but they have found no pearl of wisdom. The ways of God are indeed strange. I will pray that He will recompense you in His own inscrutable way."

While they were still deep in conversation a lunatic came swaggering along. "Well, my boys," he said, "what's all the chatter about? Come on, let me into the secret!"

The wise and learned man turned to Zayn al-Arab and said: "One can never tell. A flower of wisdom may bloom in the mind of such a crazy fellow as this one; those moonstruck as he is often have strange insights. Let us tell him of your misfortune and see what he will say."

But Zayn al-Arab replied: "Dear friend, if you with all your learning and wisdom have failed to find a solution even after ten days of cogitation, how can we hope to gain anything by consulting this unfortunate fellow whose mind is so deranged that he scarcely knows the difference between day and night?"

And the wise and learned man said: "There is no knowing how he may reply. But ideas enter the minds of the foolish as well as of the wise and even the wildest, most crazy remark from him may give us a clue or set us off on a new line of thought. The ways of God are strange indeed as are often his instruments."

While this conversation was taking place the lunatic was prancing about all around them, gesticulating madly, and a little boy who was passing stopped to watch his antics.

So Zayn al-Arab and the wise and learned man told the lunatic the story of the missing treasure. The lunatic, delighted at being thus consulted, crossed his arms and thrust his chin into the cup of his right hand in a pose of deep meditation. There was a period of silence. Zayn al-Arab and the wise and learned man

waited. The little boy looked on. Then suddenly straightening himself, the lunatic declared:

"He who took the root of the tree for a medicine also took the gold." Then he spun round on his heel and swaggered on his way. The little boy, who was evidently taking a great interest in the proceedings, remained. Zayn al-Arab and the wise and learned man discussed how the lunatic's remark might be interpreted.

Then the little boy spoke up. He asked if he might be told what kind of tree it was under which Zayn al-Arab had buried his treasure.

"It was a jujube tree," replied Zayn al-Arab.

"Then the matter is quite simple," said the boy. "All you have to do is to call on all the doctors in the city and ask them if they have a patient for whom a medicine made of the root of the jujube tree has been prescribed."

The wise and learned man was greatly impressed by the boy's good sense and by the flash of inspiration that had illuminated the mind of the unfortunate lunatic. He was well acquainted with the physicians of the city and he set about making enquiries.

It was not long before he discovered that some twenty days previously one of the doctors had been consulted by a merchant named Khoja Samander who was suffering from asthma, and for him the doctor had prescribed the root of the jujube tree.

The wise and learned man thereupon sought out the merchant Khoja Samander. He called at the merchant's house and found him restored to perfect health.

"Oh Khoja" said the wise and learned man, "do you not agree that good health is worth more than riches? Would you not give all your worldly possessions for the gift of health?" He paused and then went on: "By God's blessing you have overcome your asthma and are now enjoying perfect health."

Do you not agree that the treasure you found at the foot of the jujube tree should be returned to its rightful owner? He is a good, upright man and his treasure, which is all he has, was the fruit of many years' labour."

The merchant Khoja Samander was an honest man. "You are right," he said. "I found the gold and it is with me still. Tell me the exact amount and it shall be restored to its owner in full."


Zayn al-Arab told his friend exactly what sum of gold he had buried and to his unspeakable joy it was all returned to him.

### III

## The Story of King Jemshed

ONCE upon a time, many thousands of years ago, the people who lived in the Elburz mountains, a great chain of hills lying to the north of Persia, chose from among their number a king to rule over them. His name was Kaiumers. Until this time the people, who slept in hillside caves and wore the skins of animals they had killed for food, had lived on an equal footing, every man for himself, acknowledging no one man as superior. But Kaiumers was a natural leader and he was wise and of such commanding presence that even the animals assembled to do him homage. The wolf, the leopard and the fierce wild boar prostrated themselves before Kaiumers, while lions and tigers approached from the distant forest to declare their subservience, and the fleetfooted ass sped from the desert to show his loyalty.

Kaiumers grew great and strong, and as so often happens to people whose power increases, he came to be regarded as an enemy by the King of the Demons who ruled over the province of Mazanderan, which lay to the north of Kaiumers' kingdom, the kingdom of Persia. These Demons partly resembled men but they had horns and long ears and tails and





some of them were also giants. Furthermore they were possessed of magic powers; they could call up fires and whirl-winds and could completely vanish from sight at will.



Kaiumers' son led an army of Persian soldiers into battle.

Kaiumers had no desire to be on hostile terms with anyone but, solely out of envy and jealousy and quite without any direct provocation, the King of the Demons sent a vast army of cat-headed men, giants and terrifying monsters to invade Persia. Kaiumers' son (Kaiumers himself was now no longer young) led an army of Persian soldiers into battle against this terrible and savage horde, but he was killed almost as soon as the fighting began, and once this had happened the Persian army fled, the men taking refuge once more in their mountain caves. The Demons pursued them, captured them

and treated them as slaves. Thus, as well as mourning for the loss of his son, Kaiumers grieved for the enslavement of his once proud and prospering people.

But the gods are always just and they did not long stand aside seeing Kaiumers, who had done no wrong and who was now an old man, hiding in a lonely cave in fear of his life. They spoke to him as he crouched there in misery. "Do not despair, Kaiumers," said a mysterious awe-inspiring voice. "Summon the bravest of your subjects and victory shall be yours!"

Kaiumers, thus encouraged, roused himself from his despondency and called to him his beloved grandson Husheng, commanding him to lead an army of the bravest men he could muster in an effort to overthrow the Demons. Husheng, however, did not depend solely upon men, but called upon the animals and birds to help him.

As the great army of Demons advanced it was a fearsome sight indeed, encompassed about with flames and huge clouds of smoke. But here the birds of the air proved themselves wonderful allies. They caused confusion among the Demons by flying straight into their faces and making vicious swoops at their eyes. The Persians themselves fought with great heroism, Husheng himself slaying the Demon King in single combat. Upon the death of the leader, the whole Demon army was routed and as they retreated in panic they were pursued by tigers, wolves and panthers who bit them and clawed them, tearing them to pieces as they fled.

Thus was the prophecy of the gods fulfilled. The Kingdom of Persia was once more secure and at peace and, having security and peace, it prospered and in it the arts flourished. By the time Husheng's grandson was on the throne the Demons had been utterly subjugated and they now laboured at the Persians' bidding.

King Jemshed, as Husheng's grandson was called, was a great and wise monarch. Under his rule Persia entered into a Golden Age which lasted for seven hundred years. During this time illness, disease and even old age were unknown. Jemshed and his subjects lived continuously in the very heyday of youth and strength, so highly favoured by the Gods were they. During this period too, magnificent palaces were built for them by the Demons, fine ships were launched on the Caspian Sea, and Jemshed, if he wished to move from one city to the other, could be so transported in a flash, sitting on his throne, all by the magic of the now subservient Demons. But perhaps the most remarkable of Jemshed's possessions was his goblet, or the Cup of Jemshed as it was known far and wide. This goblet was of such lustre that it dazzled all beholders; at the same time it mirrored the whole world and by gazing into it Jemshed could see the shape that future events would take in far-flung places.

The royal palace which Jemshed occupied in the centre of the city was a place of fabulous, fairylike magnificence. The outer walls were covered with painted tiles and the many windows and balconies were framed in the most delicate filigree of stonework inset with pieces of mirror-glass. As their many facets caught the light, the entire palace glittered and sparkled as if it were encrusted with diamonds.

Inside, fairylike fountains played in the lofty halls, priceless silken carpets covered the soft divans. The walls were adorned with paintings, embroidered silks and jewelled hangings. It was of a magnificence which is barely imaginable, for had it not all been fashioned by the magic powers of the subjugated Demons?

Persia had suffered one period of trouble because of the jealousy and envy of a neighbouring ruler; now trouble came again to Persia, but this time it was through the pride of Jemshed.

One day King Jemshed commanded all his subjects to assemble in the great square in front of the palace. Jemshed's magic throne was placed there and as the bright sunshine caught it, the sight was almost too dazzling for human eyes to rest upon, so richly was it bejewelled. About the throne stood an impressive bodyguard composed of cat-headed demons and fearsome-looking djinns. Graceful fairies supported a magnificent awning.

The mighty snow-covered Elburz mountain range formed the background to this magnificent spectacle, while smoke from the great volcano Demavend curled ponderously into the clear blue sky of a Persian winter.

The scene was set, the people were assembled, waiting to hear for what purpose their King had called them together. At last the trumpets sounded and the throbbing of the drums, beaten by hand, was heard. A wave of excitement passed through the assembled crowds and then the great moment arrived. Jemshed, attended by his mightiest warriors and the most learned of his subjects, came forth from his palace and mounted his throne. His people fell on their faces before him and did obeisance to him.

King Jemshed was wearing many coats of silk, one on top of the other, and a coat of fur on top of them all. His gorgeously embroidered trousers were tight at the ankles, his slippers were of pure gold. On his head he wore a large, many-coloured turban, on the front of which blazed a huge diamond.

A loud and prolonged cry of admiration rose from the assembled crowd. The King paused for a moment to receive the ovation. He then raised his sceptre and commanded his people to rise and be silent. In an instant there was such complete silence that you could have heard a pin drop, or, as the Persians there would have said, you could hear Demavend smoking. All waited eagerly for their ruler, whom they called

the Shelter of the Universe, to speak.

King Jemshed addressed his people as the "subjects of the greatest monarch on earth," which shows how foolishly proud he had become. He then asked them:

"Why are disease, poverty and death unknown in this land? Why is it that you, my subjects, remain always young and fair? Other kingdoms, even those upon our frontiers, are not favoured as we are. They know times of famine and pestilence; death diminishes their numbers and those whom death does not take grow old and feeble. To whom, I ask you, are you indebted for eternal youth and beauty?"

The people, who were accustomed to giving thanks to the gods for their good fortune, now replied loudly with one voice: "Hail to the mighty gods!"

Then suddenly there fell an uneasy silence, for the people observed with surprise that their King looked mightily displeased. His face had clouded over and a dark frown furrowed his brow.

"Foolish ones!" he cried angrily. "Blind as moles, brainless as worms! What has your good fortune to do with the favour of the Gods? Do you not realize that all your good fortune flows from me, your King? It is I, I who have driven away poverty, disease and death. I am the fountain of all goodness. All the beauty that you enjoy comes from me, and from me alone. It is Jemshed, your King, to whom you must give thanks!"

The people, though doubtless somewhat surprised at this outburst of foolish pride, were accustomed to obey their ruler, and since it appeared that he required assent and acclamation from them, they shouted to signify their loyalty.

Even as they shouted a great change came over the snow-covered mountain called Demavend. It had suddenly turned a dull-glowing red and ugly black smoke came billowing from the crater and began to settle like a pall over the plain below where the

people were assembled. Their hearts were filled with a sudden terror and they naturally turned to their beloved ruler in their distress.

But even as they looked upon the self-styled source of all the golden joys with which they had for so long been showered, the grandeur of proud King Jemshed passed away before their very eyes. The monarch's royal robes changed into fluttering rags such as the poorest beggar would have disdained to wear, the fairylike palace crumbled into a mass of grey ruins and the gem-studded magic throne turned to dust. The people discovered to their horror the ground beneath their feet was crawling with venomous snakes and loathsome lizards, while the great black cloud above them was raining yellow and black scorpions, fat-bodied tarantulas and hairy centipedes.

The gods indeed were angry and were showing their displeasure in an unmistakable manner. As the people shrank away from the plague of reptiles and insects that was settling upon their city, they denounced Jemshed, whose foolish and impious pride had brought all this misfortune upon them and marked the end of their idyllic Golden Age.

How Jemshed regretted his arrogant words ! How he wished he could recall that moment when he had summoned his people to him ! How differently he would have acted ! After centuries of happy, fruitful living he and his people had been ruined in a flash by his thoughtless conceit. But regrets now were of no avail. It was too late. What was gone was gone.

Jemshed had lost the respect of his people, and many of his nobles and warriors even went so far as to give their allegiance to Zohak, an Arab king, who was a slave to Iblis, the Spirit of Evil. Zohak, thus encouraged, was fired by ambition to conquer Persia, a far larger and richer kingdom than his own, and he accordingly sent a powerful army to invade the country.

The once happy and prosperous kingdom of Jemshed was overrun by hordes of wild Arabs, and Jemshed was powerless to stop them. His soldiers, who formerly had been convinced that everything was possible so long as their King was with them, now cursed him openly as he tried to lead them into battle on his milk-white charger. At first they followed him sullenly, and half-heartedly, but discontent and rebellion rapidly spread through the ranks until finally the entire Persian army refused to fight. The archers would not draw their bows, the slingers threw their stones to the ground and the officers left their swords in their sheaths and would not unfasten the heavy battle-axes from their saddles.

Jemshed galloped to and fro among his men, brandishing his huge spiked mace, threatening to kill them with his own hands if they did not bestir themselves and resist the Arabs. But feeling secure in their numbers, they showed no fear at the King's display of anger, although not long before they would have prostrated themselves to the ground at the King's approach and would have remained prostrate until he commanded them to rise.

Jemshed had to admit that he was beaten. With his own army in rebellion against him and the hordes of Arabs closing in upon him, he decided to make off while there was still a chance of avoiding capture. He therefore dug the corners of his shovel-shaped stirrups into his steed and galloped away. Arab horsemen followed in his pursuit, but as Jemshed was riding the swiftest horse in Persia he outstripped his pursuers and disappeared across the plain in a cloud of dust.

Thereafter he became a poor, lonely wanderer, friendless, encompassed only with enemies.

In which direction should he turn? To the north, on the far side of the Elburz mountains, lay the fertile slopes of Mazanderan, but this was the country

of the Demons, who since their defeat by the Persians under Jemshed's grandfather, the valiant Husheng, had been enslaved by the Persians and would now assuredly kill their erstwhile overlord at the first opportunity. No, it would be folly indeed to head northwards.

To the west were the Arab hordes from whom he had so narrowly escaped and who were assuredly still striving to make him their prize, while to the south lay the Persian Gulf which he had heard was full of crocodiles, sharks and other sea monsters which made a habit of coming ashore and devouring the wretched inhabitants.

There remained only the east. Jemshed decided to make his way towards India. There he hoped he might enter the service of some powerful ruler, and later, when he had proved himself, enlist his aid in reconquering his lost kingdom.

So Jemshed travelled eastwards on horseback. He carried nothing with him, not even a tent in which to shelter during the night. And he was afraid to enter the caravanserais where other travellers would be pausing in their journeys in case he should be recognized and delivered once more into the hands of his enemies. No, all the shelter he was ever able to enjoy was in the poor mud hut of some simple peasant of whom he would beg this favour.

Day after day Jemshed travelled eastwards, crossing broad plains, riding along rough tracks, painfully crossing ranges of barren hills and dreary expanses of desert, devoid of food or water for man and beast. It was a wonder that Jemshed and his horse survived; in fact they nearly died.

After several days' arduous plodding through the desert's arid wastes, Jemshed drank the very last drop of water from the leather bottle that hung from his saddle. He had been told where he would find the water-hole but he still had some way to go. It was



winter still and the nights were bitterly cold, but during the day sun blazed down from a clear blue sky on the mounds of loose yellow sand which stretched away before Jemshed and his weary horse like the waves of a hostile sea.

There came a time when the milk-white steed, which, like Jemshed, had known such different days, could bear the weight of his master no longer. Jemshed dismounted, and floundering wearily in the loose sand, struggled on, his faithful companion stumbling painfully in his wake.

They travelled thus for two more days, suffering agonies of thirst, the mouth parched, the tongue swollen. What a contrast was this with the days when Jemshed had drunk at will the choicest wines of Shiraz!

On the morning of the third day the milk-white steed was so weak that it could not stagger to its feet. King Jemshed, now utterly despairing, stumbled forward alone, still in search of water. Then, as he dragged himself wearily to the top of a chain of sandhills he saw a little tamarisk scrub growing at their base and some shallow depressions in the ground below him.

Here was water at last! Jemshed flung himself on to his knees and dug into the sand with his hands. The sand became more and more moist as he scratched away, until at length the water formed into a slow trickle.

Jemshed drank deeply and gratefully of the precious liquid, feeling it spread its blessing throughout his parched, dried-up body. Then, wonderfully refreshed, he filled his astrakhan hat as best he could and moving as quickly as was possible without spilling the life-restoring water, he made his way back to his horse, praying that he would not be too late to save his faithful companion from death.

The poor beast was indeed stretched out as if life

had already departed from its body, but as Jemshed approached he was relieved to hear it still gasping. Gently Jemshed poured the water down the horse's throat and before long the animal was able to get to its feet and follow its master back to the water-hole where it drank and drank as if it could never drink enough.

And so horse and rider continued eastwards, ever eastwards, day after day, week after week. The glorious Persian sunsets flamed in the sky behind Jemshed, casting their rose and purple lights on to the hills ahead, while at night the moon sailed across a velvet sky of darkest sapphire brilliantly studded with stars like diamonds. Long before morning Jemshed would often be awakened by the curious "false dawn," then darkness would fall again, to be dispelled by the dawn proper in the form of a crimson streak in the eastern sky which grew and grew until it seemed to explode into flocks of tiny, rosy clouds and the sun blazoned forth to mark the beginning of a new day.

But even the longest, most weary journey has an end, and Jemshed at last found himself in the kingdom of Zabulistan, which at one time had sent an annual tribute to the great King Jemshed of Persia. This same Jemshed now entered Zabulistan as a homeless wanderer going in fear of his life.

Now Gureng, the King of Zabulistan, had a daughter whose name was Ferooze. Ferooze was so lovely at the Court poets vied with each other to find word to describe her peerless beauty. Her figure, tall and slender, they likened to the cypress, her proud and graceful walk to that of the pheasant, "her face has the shining serenity of the moon." they sang, "her lips are sweet as sugar, her cheeks are smooth and lovely as rose-petals." Her eyes were of such exquisite beauty that no poet could find words to describe them.

There were, needless to say, many suitors for the hand of this lovely princess, but her mind was made up about whom she wished to marry and her devoted father promised that he would never force her to marry a prince of his choice against her will.

And who was it whom Princess Ferooze wished to marry? None other than the great and powerful King Jemshed, the god-favoured monarch whose fame was widespread.

Ferooze had an old nurse, a woman from Kabul who was skilled in all the enchantments of the Afghans. She could read the hidden secrets of the universe by studying the moon and stars and was able to foretell the future. This old nurse had indeed prophesied that her mistress, Princess Ferooze, would become the wife of King Jemshed, and so brilliant was the prospect before her that Ferooze would not even consider the many suitors who came from far and wide to seek her hand in marriage.

King Gureng too was well satisfied with the old nurse's prophecy—until news came of Zoliak's invasion of Persia and of Jemshed's humiliation and flight. These disastrous tidings reached the ears of Gureng while he was away visiting a distant part of his dominions.

It was the month of May when Jemshed arrived at the city of Zabul. The roses were in full bloom and the sun, which had not yet reached its full intensity, shone down benignly. Outside the city gates there was a big walled enclosure, shaded by trees and cooled by running water, and this Jemshed, now a beggar, made to enter. He was unutterably weary after his hard journey and he longed to rest. But he was dismayed to find that guards were posted there barring his entrance. They explained that the Princess Ferooze was within the enclosure amusing herself with her maidens and that no stranger might enter. Jemshed, weary and dispirited, sank to the

ground where he stood, glad enough to accept the shade of a tree outside the enclosure, and as he rested there a slave-girl came out of the garden.

Now Jemshed, for all his arrogance and the misfortune which had followed it, and in spite of all the weary miles he had travelled, still retained his youthful and princely bearing. The slave-girl was much impressed by the handsome wanderer who was begging for wine to lessen his torment of mind and she asked him to tell her about himself. Jemshed told the slave-girl that he had travelled from a kingdom far to the west, and that although he was now the poorest of beggars he had once been rich and powerful, whereupon the slave-girl ran excitedly back into the garden to tell the Princess and her maidens that a handsome youth with a strange and intriguing story was resting outside the gates.

Princess Ferooze, who was occupied only in amusing herself and was glad of any diversion, hurried to the gate to see this remarkable stranger. The moment her eyes lighted upon Jemshed, Ferooze fell in love with him, and she invited him to accompany her back into the garden. Jemshed hesitated. Princess Ferooze told Jemshed who she was. Still Jemshed held back. Might he not be recognized and be handed over once more to his enemies? Or if he were not recognized, might the King, Princess Ferooze's father, be displeased that his daughter should amuse herself with a beggar? With these thoughts passing through his mind Jemshed remained as if rooted to the spot. But Ferooze gazed at him with love in her eyes and held out her hand to him, telling him at the same time, as if reading at least some of his thoughts, that her father granted her every wish. Jemshed's resistance weakened, melted by the charm and loveliness of Princess Ferooze as she stood there clad in a loose-sleeved jacket of silver gauze, long, full, silken trousers, and with the thick plaits of her



Ferooze gazed at him with love in her eyes.

black hair crowned with a little jewelled cap. •

Together they re-entered the garden and walked side by side along the shady avenues until they reached the fountain around which rich carpets and cushions were spread. The Princess invited the stranger to be seated beside her and then, clapping her hands, instructed her slaves to bring food and wine for her guest. A silken cloth was first placed on the ground and then the slaves approached bearing golden trays laden with sumptuous dishes of meat, rice and vegetables, fruits, sweetmeats and wines.

As Jemshed held a brimming goblet to his lips he felt his weariness vanish and his sadness of spirit lift. He told the Princess that her kindness and her hospitality gave him new courage; he felt now that he was able to put all his misery and misfortune behind him and face the world again. As he spoke he seemed so fired with nobility and he bore himself with such royal dignity and grace that the Princess was suddenly convinced that her guest was none other than King Jemshed, her long-awaited bridegroom himself. Without betraying these her innermost thoughts, however, she secretly sent a slave to the palace to bring her a portrait of King Jemshed that she might compare it with the stranger whom she was entertaining.

Meanwhile two doves fluttered by and then settled on a wall near where Jemshed and the Princess were sitting. The Princess, telling the stranger that no warrior in the land could surpass her sureness of aim, sent for her bows and arrows. But Jemshed gently took them from her, saying, "If I hit the mate will the lady I most admire in the world be mine?"

Ferooze, who was now deeply in love, smiled in assent. Jemshed took aim and his dove was slain. The Princess then took the bow and, gazing into Jemshed's eyes, asked if she should marry the man she loved if her aim were also true.

Ferooze's arrow pierced the heart of the other dove. She and Jemshed joined hands and smiled at each other, love shining from their eyes. At this moment the old nurse from Kabul came hobbling up to them. She drew her mistress to one side and told her that the handsome stranger was none other than King Jemshed himself. While she was imparting this news the slave came running up carrying the portrait. Ferrooze looked at it and then handed it to Jemshed.

The picture portrayed Jemshed at the height of his supremacy, clad in gorgeous robes, crowned with jewels and seated upon the magic throne. At the sight of it Jemshed broke down and wept. Not only was he stirred by the memory of his lost splendour, he was also moved anew by fear of his enemy Zohak. He therefore refrained from acknowledging his identity and sought to keep Ferrooze and the nurse in doubt.

Ferooze, however, avowed her love for him with such fervour and sincerity that finally he told her of all that had happened and all that was troubling him. When he had poured out the whole story he paced for a while deep in nostalgic thought. Ferrooze placed her hands in his and gazed upon him tenderly.

"Truly," she said, "you have incurred the anger of the gods. But nothing lasts for ever. Good fortune has already begun to smile on you again, for fate has brought you to me, and if you and I wed you will one day become King of Zabulistan, for my father has no son to succeed him."

Jemshed, however, felt that by marrying him Ferrooze would be joining forces with one whom the gods no longer favoured and that he would bring misfortune upon her. And so they argued, now this way, now that. Their altercation was interrupted by the old Kabuli nurse who reminded the Princess that the stars had foretold that she should marry King Jem-

shed and that no earthly power could keep them apart. Jemshed bowed to the wisdom of the old woman and then, turning to Ferooze, vowed to love and serve her to the best of his power all his life long. Thereupon the priest was summoned (he it was who had taught Ferooze as a child and had instructed her in the mysteries of her religion) and King Jemshed and Princess Ferooze were married in accordance with the customs of Zabulistan.

Meanwhile, Ferooze's father, King Gureng of Zabulistan, was, it will be remembered, visiting a far-distant part of his kingdom. His consent to the marriage had not been sought. Nor was a messenger dispatched to tell him of the wedding. Ferooze greatly feared his displeasure, and living for the moment only, for the deliriously happy present, she felt relieved that her father the King was so far away, although she knew that a day of reckoning would have to come.

But now, casting all care for the future aside, there was music and dancing to celebrate the royal wedding, the happy pair reclining on banks of fresh pink roses to enjoy the entertainment. When the singing and dancing were over and the drums and stringed instruments were silent once more, the bride and bride-groom were sprinkled with rose-water and then one of the Court poets was summoned to recite tales of old Kaiumers and his grandson, the valiant Husheng.

The weeks of honeymoon passed like a lovely dream. Jemshed, at this pinnacle of happiness following such dire sufferings, loved his wife more tenderly and selflessly than he ever could have in the days of his pride. The Princess's happiness was joyous and intense but clouded somehow, sowewhere, by fear of her father's anger when he heard the news. So she kept telling herself that whatever the future might hold nothing could take away from her the exquisite happiness of her honeymoon and that no price



would be too high a price to pay for the rapturous joy of the present.

The day at length arrived when King Gureng returned from his travels. When he learned that during his absence his beloved only daughter had married, and when he reflected that this marriage had taken place not only without his permission but without even consulting or informing him, his wrath knew no bounds. He at once summoned the Princess to his presence and reproached her for having, during his absence, become tied to a mere unknown stranger. The Princess, thinking quickly to counter this objection, replied that her husband was no mere, unknown stranger, but the great King Jemshed himself. At this point the old nurse, who had accompanied her mistress to the King's presence, intervened excitedly to point out that with this marriage her prophecy had been fulfilled. This was the marriage the stars had foretold.

King Gureng's face beamed with satisfaction and for one moment Ferooze thought that her happiness was about to receive the seal of her father's approval.

"Can it really be Jemshed?" King Gureng exclaimed.

"Indeed, it is King Jemshed himself," cried Ferooze happily, "none other!"

"Then I must thank you my daughter," said the King, "for having captured this prize for me during my absence! I shall order Jemshed to be bound and delivered to Zohak, the King of the Arabs, and I shall be rewarded with a fine kingdom."

Ferooze fell at her father's feet weeping.

"That would be treachery most foul," she cried. "You my father would be punished by the gods for such a deed. And I would die of grief."

The King, who dearly loved his daughter and could not bear to see her so grief-stricken, relented somewhat. He said he would abandon his plan to

deliver Jemshed to his enemy and would accept him as a son-in-law. Ferooze hurried away to tell her husband the joyous news.

As soon as Ferooze had left his presence, however, King Gureng began to have second thoughts. And the more he thought about what he had said to Ferooze, affected as he had been by the grief of his beloved daughter, the more disquieted he felt. "For," he told himself, "would not Zohak come and destroy the kingdom of Zabulistan if he should discover that Jemshed had taken refuge there?" He considered what he should do, and decided that his first step should be to call together a council of his ministers and acquaint them of the position without delay.

The chiefs and nobles of Zabulistan were horrified when they learned that Jemshed was in the country and in such a favoured position. Like the King, they feared an invasion by the Arab king and counselled Gureng to seize Jemshed at once and imprison him.

Ferooze, however, had become fearful for her husband's safety, her suspicions having been aroused by the calling together of a council at such short notice and at such an unusual hour. She accordingly hid behind one of the silken carpets which adorned the walls of the council chamber and overheard every word of the discussion. As soon as the last of the ministers had left she crept out and hurried to Jemshed to warn him of his danger, and although she was torn with grief at having to part thus so soon and so tragically with her beloved she wasted no time in useless lamenting but bent all her energies towards procuring as far as possible her husband's safety. First she sent her most trusted slave to get a peasant dress for Jemshed. Then she stained his skin with the juice of the walnut. After that she collected together all the gold and jewels which were her personal property, sewed them inside a belt and then fastened the belt around Jemshed's waist. Her work

completed, she saw with satisfaction that the disguise was complete. Surely no one now would recognize Jemshed.

They kissed tenderly while Ferooze strove to hold back her tears. Then once more Jemshed set out into the world as a homeless wanderer.

And so he travelled on, growing ever more weary and dispirited. The days seemed endless and without purpose, and during the long, sad nights, sleep evaded him. One day, when he felt he had surely reached the limits of endurance, he lay down in the shade of a great tower in the fertile land of India. "Am I," he cried, "whose glory once reached to the heavens, to perish thus miserably as a homeless wanderer? Oh, that I had never been granted the gift of life!" And so thinking and weeping he fell asleep.

And, alas, as he slept there, defenceless upon the open ground, a cavalcade passed by headed by an envoy from the Court of Zohak. This envoy was not deceived by the disguise. He recognized Jemshed at once. He called upon his men to seize him and put him in chains.

Zohak was filled with malicious joy when he was told that Jemshed, who had so long evaded him, was now in his power. Impatient to gloat over his captive, he ordered that the prisoner be brought before him at once.

"And where now is your crown?" he cried mockingly, as Jemshed was dragged before the throne. "Where is now your great kingdom? And where now are all your loyal subjects?"

Jemshed maintained a dignified and fearless silence while Zohak became more and more enraged by his captive's proud bearing. Finally Jemshed was led away to be tortured to death.

He bore himself courageously to the last.

Meanwhile Princess Ferooze wept and waited, eagerly questioning every likely traveller for news of

her beloved husband. As the weeks and months passed and no word of him was heard, the Princess began to hope that he might have escaped. But one day a long-haired, wild-eyed fakir, wearing a leopard-skin over his shoulders, entered the city of Zabul. Ferooze summoned him to her presence and learned that he had come straight from the Court of Zohak and that he had been among the crowd which had witnessed the death by torture of King Jemshed. Urged on by the Princess and expecting to receive large alms for his trouble, the fakir gave the Princess a detailed account of all he had seen and heard.

Ferooze was overwhelmed with grief and anguish. She sank back on to her cushions and fainted away. When she had been revived she told her sorrowing maidens that she could not bear to live any longer. She then took a draught of poison and died.

King Gureng now regretted his betrayal of Jemshed and was heart-broken at the death of his beloved daughter. But it was too late now to make amends and Gureng too died sorrowing.

Thus did the great King Jemshed offend the gods and bring misery to others by his pride. Nothing he could do, no long journeys or disguises could hide him from the gods' all-seeing eyes or avert the punishment due to him for his presumption.

## IV

### The Man Whose Luck was Asleep

ONCE upon a time there were two brothers who had each inherited an equal share of their father's property, but while the land of the younger brother flourished and prospered although he took no trouble with it at all, that of the elder remained totally unproductive however hard he worked. The elder brother therefore came to the conclusion that the younger brother's land must be more rich and fertile than his and suggested that they should exchange. The younger brother happily agreed, but this made no difference. The younger brother continued to have good crops and reap plentiful harvests while the elder brother's land was producing nothing at all.

The elder brother, now more puzzled than ever, pondered on what he should do and one day he decided that he would go to his brother's corn heap at night, take some of his corn and spread it upon his own. He duly arrived at the spot after darkness had fallen, tethered his donkey, and was just about to open the sack he had brought with him when a strange man suddenly appeared in front of him and asked him what he was doing there.

"I think I should ask you that," said the elder brother. "Who are you?"

"I," said the stranger, "am your brother's Luck and it is part of my duty to watch over his corn and see that no one steals it."

"Oh, you are my brother's Luck, are you?" said the elder brother. "Well, I should very much like to know where my Luck is."

The stranger told the elder brother that his Luck was to be found on the top of a far-distant mountain and gave him directions how to get there. "If you want your affairs to prosper," he added, "you must find your Luck and wake him up."

The elder brother, now convinced that his fortune was about to change, gathered together all he would need for his long journey, placed his land in his younger brother's care, and set off.

He had travelled some distance when he was terrified to see a fierce lion in his path, moving threateningly towards him as if to devour him. The elder brother went on his knees and begged the lion to spare him and allow him to continue on his way in safety.

"I will let you go," said the lion, "provided you tell me exactly where you are off to and what you are going to do."

The elder brother told the lion all about his troubles and that he was making this journey to find his Luck and wake him up.

"Oh," said the Lion. "Well, when you have found your Luck and wakened him, please oblige me by asking him why it is that however much I eat I never feel satisfied, and enquire of him if there is any cure for this condition."

The elder brother agreed to do this, and continued on his way until he came to a village where he met an old farmer who offered him shelter for the night. In the course of the evening the elder brother told

the farmer all about himself and how he was going to find his Luck and wake him up.



The elder brother told the lion all about his troubles,

“When you have found your Luck and wakened him,” said the farmer, “please do me the kindness of asking him why it is that a certain piece of ground I have, however much I tend it, will not yield.”

Next morning, the elder brother started off on his journey once more and went on and on until he reached the gates of a city. As was the custom in this place, the stranger was at once led into the presence of the King, who enquired what business had brought him there. Once more the elder brother told his story, and the King too asked a favour of him.

“When you have found your Luck and wakened him,” said the King, “please ask him on my behalf why it is that however much I care for my country

and my people, my realm does not prosper as it should."

Having agreed to the King's request, the elder brother left the city and continued on his journey which was now nearing its end. Soon the mountain was in sight and before long the elder brother was toiling up its slopes. On the summit he found a large well-set-up man lying asleep and snoring loudly. The elder brother bent down and roused him: "Come on," he called. "Wake up! Do you sleep all your time away?"

The man rubbed his eyes, yawned loudly and stretched. "Ah," he said, "now I am awake I shall not go to sleep again. Do not worry."

When the man was thoroughly awake the elder brother put to him the questions he had promised the lion, the farmer and the King he would ask, and when he had got the answers he started on his way down again.

First he came to the city gates and was once more led before the King.

"Well," said the King, "did you manage to find your Luck and waken him and put my question to him?"

"Yes, I did," said the elder brother, mightily pleased with himself.

"And what was the answer?" enquired the King.

"We shall need to be alone before I can tell you that," said the elder brother. "I must tell you in private."

The King accordingly gave orders that everyone should leave the audience chamber and when the King and the elder brother were alone, the latter said:

"My Luck said that you, your Majesty, are really a woman and that a country never prospers under a woman's rule."

The King became greatly agitated and implored the elder brother never to let anyone else know the secret.



"But," he added, "now that you have discovered it, you shall become king in my stead and marry me."

"Oh, I cannot possibly do that," exclaimed the elder brother. "I must get back to my land. Now that my Luck is awake I can expect an end to my troubles and my next harvest will doubtless be a good one."

The King thereupon enquired as to the extent of his land and offered him estates many times its value, but the elder brother would hear none of it and continued on his way.

And once again he approached the village where he had spent the night with the farmer. His former host greeted him and gave him a great welcome, enquiring eagerly whether he had managed to find his Luck and waken him.

"Yes, I did," replied the elder brother.

"And what is his answer to my question?" asked the farmer.

"He says that the reason that certain piece of ground does not yield is that there is treasure buried beneath it. If you will dig and recover the treasure, the ground will become fertile again."

Thereupon the old farmer led the elder brother to the piece of ground in question and fetched a spade for each of them. Together they dug and dug until they came upon one, then two, then three—in all seven fabulous jars full of gold.

"My friend," said the farmer, "I am old and have not much longer to live. Stay with me, marry my daughter and this land and this treasure will be yours."

"Oh, I could not possibly do that," replied the elder brother. "I must get back to my land. Now that my Luck is awake I can expect an end to my troubles and my next harvest will doubtless be a good one."

The old farmer did his best to persuade him, but his mind was made up and once more he set off on his homeward way.

And then he met again the lion who asked him how he had fared. The elder brother told the lion of all his adventures so far, finishing with an account of how the King who was a woman had wanted him to marry her and become ruler of the kingdom and how the farmer with the buried treasure had wanted him to stay and marry his daughter.

"And what was your Luck's answer to my question?" asked the lion.

"My Luck," said the elder brother importantly, "said there certainly is a cure for your trouble."

"And what is it?" said the lion. "I cannot wait."

"My Luck said," continued the elder brother, "that whenever you meet a man who is a complete fool



They dug and dug, until they came upon one, then two, then three—in all, seven fabulous jars full of gold.

you should at once tear him to pieces and gobble him up."

There was a little pause while the lion pondered on these words. Then he said: "Well, I never in all my life met a more complete fool than you!"

And that was the end of the elder brother.

## The Story of the Evil King Zohak

ZOHAK, the cruel tyrant who murdered the once great King Jemshed of Persia, had as a young prince led an entirely blameless life, and his father, King of the Arabs, was so kind and generous that the gods greatly multiplied his flocks and herds to reward him for his continual almsgiving. But one day Prince Zohak was visited by the Evil Spirit Iblis. Iblis appeared to him as a holy man, and discoursed so beautifully of high matters, that the young Prince was completely deceived by him.

As soon as Iblis saw what an impression he had made, he ceased talking, and when Zohak implored him to continue, he said that he would not say another word unless the Prince would swear to grant him one wish.

The young man, feeling sure that the desire of so pious a dervish must be righteous, agreed; but he was thrown into an agony of mind when Ibl's revealed to him his horrible plan. "Your father is now old and no longer fitted to be King," said the Evil Spirit. "You must kill him and sit on the throne in his stead." And when Zohak refused to consent to such wickedness, Iblis laughed scornfully and said:

"Do not resist. Your oath has placed you in my power."

The Evil Spirit proceeded to dig a deep pit as a trap in the middle of the private path which led from the palace to the House of Prayer. This Iblis covered over with grass, and when the good King went that evening to say his prayers he fell headlong into the hole and perished miserably.

His son now ruled in his stead, but was completely in the power of the Evil One, who promised to make him king of the whole world if he would obey him in all things. And so he grew more and more wicked every day.

One evening when Zohak was resting after his supper of roast pheasant, Iblis approached him with a request. Zohak signified his willingness to listen.

"I have one small wish, O noble King," said the wily Spirit, "and that is to kiss your shoulder."

The monarch, only too glad to gratify such an easy request, at once drew up the loose sleeve of his garment. Iblis pressed his lips to the shoulder and vanished immediately. In the twinkling of an eye, two horrible black serpents grew on the spot touched by the Devil's lips.

All the wise men of the kingdom—the doctors, magicians, and astrologers—came to see the wonder, but none of them could cure the unfortunate Zohak, and the snakes writhed to and fro on his shoulder as if hungry for food.

Iblis alone could have removed the spell, and he was nowhere to be found. But one day a reverend-looking doctor came to the palace and craved to see the King. It was really Iblis in disguise, and he informed Zohak that it had been foretold long ages ago in the stars that the Arab King would be afflicted with these terrible serpents and they would make his life a misery.

At these words the unhappy monarch nearly faint-

ed with horror, but he was revived by the pretended doctor, who said that if two human victims were offered up to the serpents every day, the spell would soon be broken. And Iblis went away, hoping that Zohak, in following his advice, would kill off a great number of men.

And now began a time of terror and anguish for the unfortunate subjects of the Arab King, because every day two youths were slain, and two more sought out for sacrifice on the following day. In fact, so dreaded was the name of Zohak throughout his own and the adjoining lands, that when King Jemshed fell from the favour of the gods, the Persian nobles offered their master's throne to Zohak, saying that they would rather have the slave of the Evil One for a friend than for an enemy. It was then that Zohak captured and cruelly put to death the unfortunate Jemshed, and ruled over Persia in his stead.

But yet more punishments were in store for the man who had sold himself to the powers of evil, and one night he was visited by a terrible dream.

In it he was attacked by three warriors, the youngest of whom hit him on the head with an iron mace, and then bound him with ropes and dragged him along the ground. At this point he woke up with yells of terror, and immediately called together the wise men of his Court, although day had not yet dawned, and demanded of them the meaning of the dream.

But the magicians, fearing that the King might slay them if they told him the interpretation, pretended that they must have time to study the question thoroughly. Zohak, however, was too much frightened to wait long, and on the fourth day insisted that they should speak.

Trembling with fear, the wise men then told the meaning of the dream. "O mighty King," they said,

"a child shall be born called Feridun, who shall slay you and take your crown."

The Arab King was nearly mad with terror when he heard the fate in store for him, but resolving to do what he could to save himself he ordered that his spies should discover whether there were any child in the kingdom by the name of Feridun.

After many conferences with his magicians, he learnt that his destroyer would come from a certain family; he thereupon commanded that all members of the tribe to which the family belonged should be bound and brought before him.

The father of Feridun fled on hearing this ominous command, but was captured and at once put to death. His wife, however, managed to make her escape with her infant, which she left on one of the slopes of the Elburz Range in charge of a herdsman, a pious man, who feared the gods, and who gave away the milk of his cow in charity. The poor mother felt that her child was safer in the herdsman's cottage than with her as she wandered among the pathless mountains, moving from village to village in her flight.

At the end of three years she returned to the herdsman, saying that the gods had told her in a dream to remove her son from his care; and, indeed, it was well that she did so, for on the very next day Zohak and his soldiers appeared at the pasturage and killed the herdsman and all his family—they even killed the cow—to punish them for their share in sheltering Feridun. But the boy, the object of their expedition, could nowhere be found, for the mother and child had taken refuge with a pious hermit who lived in a cave on the side of the volcano Demavend. The boy, who knew no fear, was wont to wander about the great mountain, and one day he heard a voice near him which said: "The Gods have decreed that you will destroy the wicked Zohak and become King of Persia in his stead."

Feridun started a little, and looked round in some surprise for he had imagined himself alone. But as he gazed, a sort of floating mist seemed to be rising from the ground, and slowly became a form like a gigantic man. "Fear not!" the figure continued, "I am a benevolent Genius, and wish to help you to become a worthy King of Persia."

And the Spirit was as good as his word. He taught the boy how to ride, how to draw the bow and wield the sword, and instructed him in many hidden mysteries which were to prove of much use to him in after years.

At the age of sixteen, the young Feridun, keen-faced and eagle-eyed, had the air of a leader of men and one day he told his mother that the time had come for him to avenge the death of his father.

His poor mother wept bitterly, and did her best to dissuade him from the attempt. "How can you, a mere boy, fight against the powerful King Zohak?" she exclaimed. "He will take your life with cruel tortures, and I shall rue the day that you were born. Why leave me desolate and wretched? I cannot bear to part from you."

But Feridun answered that the gods would help the right; and having bade farewell to the good Genius, who aided him greatly, he descended Mount Demavend riding a white horse harnessed with gold, the gift of the Genius, and made his way to the haunts of men.

He made an impressive figure, clad from head to foot in golden chain-armour, his helmet and shield studded with gems, while in his hand he carried a huge cow-headed mace, in memory of the animal whose milk had nourished him in his early years.

Following the advice of the Genius, he boldly approached the magnificent city where King Jemshed had formerly reigned with such pomp. As he came near one of its twelve gateways, all covered in burni-



shed tiles, he saw a great crowd coming out. At its head marched a brawny man holding a spear from the point of which waved a leather apron. This was Kavah, the blacksmith, whose two sons had been seized that very morning by the emissaries of Zohak, to be offered up in sacrifice to the serpents growing from the King's shoulder. Their father, half-mad with grief, had rushed into the bazaars, and stirring up the people to a sense of their wrongs, had called upon them to fight for freedom.

"Let us find Feridun the Deliverer!" he cried. "It is prophesied that he has been appointed by the gods to free us from the cruelty of this Arab usurper," and tearing off his leather apron, he hoisted it as the standard of revolt, and thousands followed him out of the city.

When the crowd saw a youth of such beauty and magnificence riding unattended, and evidently about to enter the town, everyone wondered who he might be. Every eye was fixed upon him, when suddenly rumble of thunder was heard in the cloudless blue sky, and a mighty voice pealed forth:

"This is Feridun! Persians, behold your King! He will deliver you from the tyrant Zohak."

With one accord the multitudes prostrated themselves before the youth, and hailed him as their monarch with loud acclamations, marching in his wake, as he proudly rode through the fine gateway, confident of victory.

He made his way slowly through the bazaars, and the workers in brass and copper, the men painting on fine vellum and wood, the enamellers and jewellers, in fact everyone whom he passed, left his work and followed Feridun with great joy.

And so he came to the Palace, but here a disappointment awaited him, for the wicked Zohak had been conveyed by the power of Iblis, the Spirit of Evil, to the city of Baghdad, on the River Tigris.

There was nothing for it but to pursue him thither. It was not an easy journey for a people not accustomed to marching. They had to pass through the provinces of Hamadam and Kermanshah, which are hilly countries, and then traverse a stretch of desert before they reached the great River Tigris. However, such was the power of the good Genius who befriended Feridun, that the Persians reached Baghdad in an incredibly short time. On their march the stony paths became level, and the heat of the sun did not affect them, and at every camping place they found hundreds of tents, with clear streams running beside them, and huge trays of food ready for the multitude to eat.

Zohak awaited them in a huge, strongly fortified tower built on the opposite bank of the river, and he felt confident that here he was safe, as he was guarded by strong enchantments and evil magic. Moreover, how were Feridun's followers to cross the Tigris, for there was no bridge, and the boats of the city were but few and small?

Feridun himself was not in the least dismayed. First, calling upon the gods to help him, he rode his white horse into the water, which suddenly became of such miraculous shallowness that all waded across in perfect safety, and proceeded to assault the tower.

The stronghold was not, however, to be taken by human means, and Feridun's good Genius appeared to him at this crisis, giving him a wonderful wand which destroyed everything that opposed him. At its touch the walls of the once impregnable fortress tottered and fell, the evil magic which protected the tower was overcome by the Powers of Good, while Demons and Genii shrivelled up like dead leaves and became mere handfuls of dust.

But the wicked Zohak was nowhere to be found, for Iblis had transported him to far-off India, together with the entire Arab army. Once more, therefore,

Foridun and his followers started in pursuit of the Arab King. But before they had gone very far, they were joined by the usurper's soldiers, who declared that they would no longer obey their cruel master. So Zohak was deserted by all, and wandered a homeless fugitive in fear of his life. He now determined to be avenged on Feridun or perish in the attempt; and one night he approached the camp of the young Persian King in a carefully thought-out disguise.

He at once knew where Feridun was, because in front of a fine tent, made of scarlet cloth embroidered with pheasants, stood the royal standard of Persia. This was still the old leather apron that had once belonged to Kavah the blacksmith, but now it was richly covered with jewels and embroidery.

Zohak crept softly up to the tent, and cautiously pulling back the flap just an inch or two, he saw Feridun lying on a pile of silk carpets. Thinking that Fate had at last delivered his foe into his hand, he glided swiftly inside with his sword drawn.

But the good Genius, who was never long absent from the Persian King, aroused him just in time, and Feridun sprang up and dealt his enemy a terrible blow with his iron-headed mace. He was about to kill him outright when a supernatural voice commanded him to forbear.

"Stay your hand, Feridun! You, O Zohak, must now suffer the penalty of your horrible crimes. The gods have sentenced you to be bound in chains, and to be cast into a dark cavern of Mount Demavend, there to drag out your miserable days."

And even at that moment, Zohak was seized by invisible hands and carried off through the air to his doom.

Feridun was now secure on the throne of Persia and for many years the country prospered under his wise rule.

## VI

### The Girl in the Golden Lampstand

ONCE upon a time there was a merchant who had a beautiful daughter. He planned to give the girl in marriage to a rich and ugly old man who was his friend. The girl's mother was dead and the father kept the girl locked up in the house all the time lest she should meet some handsome young man, fall in love and thus spoil his plans for her.

The lovely young girl hated the thought of marrying this rich old man, her father's friend, but although she tried everything she could think of to turn her father from his intention he would not listen to her. Then one day she said: "Father, if you wish me to obey you and remain locked up in this house and marry your friend, just give me this one pleasure. I have a great desire for a golden lampstand, a very grand one that will carry forty lamps at once. Will you let me order it from the goldsmith?"

The father readily agreed to this request, gave his daughter money and arranged for the goldsmith to come to the house for her instructions. When the goldsmith arrived, the girl gave him the money and asked him to make her a lampstand to take forty lamps at once, but within the stem there was to be

room for her to hide and a little door that she could open and close from the inside.

In due time the lampstand was delivered. The girl next got together food and water to last some time and hid them in the lampstand. Then one day when her father was out she placed her shoes by the edge of the well, crept into the lampstand and shut the door behind her.

When the merchant returned in the evening he searched the house in vain for his daughter until at length he discovered her shoes standing by the well.

"Alas, alas," he cried. "I did not heed my daughter's unhappiness. She has drowned herself! Oh, that I had never tried to force her to marry this man against her will!"

The merchant continued to mourn, and every evening when he returned home and saw the lampstand there, it seemed to reproach him. At length he decided he would return it to the goldsmith and ask him to try to sell it. The lampstand was accordingly placed on show in the goldsmith's shop and there it was seen by the King's son. The Prince was so enchanted with the golden lampstand that would take forty lamps together that he at once bought it and ordered that it should be taken to the palace and placed in his private apartments.

Now it was the Prince's custom to have food served to him in the evening sufficient for his supper and his breakfast. One morning he noticed that some of the food he had set aside for his breakfast had disappeared and he wondered who could have got into his room during the night while he was sleeping.

The same thing now began to happen night after night. Every morning he would notice that some of the food put ready for his breakfast had gone. He decided therefore to keep himself awake one night to see what happened.

At just around midnight, to his great amazement he

saw the stem of the golden lampstand slowly open. Out stepped a most beautiful maiden. She softly made her way to the Prince's supper table, ate daintily of the food set out there, and then returned quietly to the lampstand, gently shutting the door behind her.

The Prince had fallen in love at first sight and felt he could hardly wait until the next evening to catch another glimpse of the lovely girl in the golden lampstand. Once more he pretended to be asleep and once more he watched her as she stepped from the lampstand and sat down at his table. One more night the Prince watched in silence, and then he decided he must speak and discover who this lovely maiden was who had so won his heart. On the following night therefore, just as the girl was about to return into the lampstand, the Prince leapt from his couch, grasped her hand and asked: "Tell me, lovely one, who are you? Are you a mortal or a fairy?"

"I am no fairy, O Prince," replied the girl sadly, and then, still holding the Prince's hand, she told him her story.

They declared their undying love for each other, but decided that as yet no one should know. She would continue to live in the lampstand and every evening would come out to be with the Prince. And so they continued for some time, the girl always disappearing back into the lampstand as soon as morning light appeared.

One night, however, it chanced that one of the palace slave-girls was awake and heard sounds of merriment coming from the Prince's room. She decided to go and see what was happening, crept along the corridor and peeped into the door. She saw that the Prince was in the company of a beautiful maiden and that they were laughing and talking together. She crept back to bed again but next morning the news of what she had seen and heard was being



Every evening she would come out to be with the Prince.

passed on from one servant to another, until eventually the story reached the ears of a Princess to whom the Prince was betrothed. The Princess was consumed with anger and jealousy and bribed the slave-girls to find out where the lovely maiden came from. And in due course they brought news to the Princess that every night, when all the palace was sleeping, this beautiful maiden stepped out from the Prince's golden lampstand.

The Princess then laid her wicked plan. One day when the Prince was out hunting she sent a messenger to the palace requesting the loan of the Prince's golden lampstand to beautify her room as she was expecting guests. At first the request was refused, as the Prince had given strict instructions that no one was to touch the golden lampstand, but the Princess then sent a personal request to the Prince's mother, and succeeded in persuading her that no possible harm could come to the lampstand if she borrowed it for a few hours.

When the palace servants had accordingly delivered the lampstand to the Princess she at once lit all forty lamps and left them burning until the whole of the interior became so hot that the poor girl inside could stand it no longer. She opened the door, rushed out and fell to the floor in a dead faint.

The wicked Princess thought that the girl was indeed dead and summoned one of her slaves, instructing him to roll the body in a cloth and throw it into the moat. The slave at once obeyed, the poor unconscious girl was thrown roughly into the water, and the slave returned to the palace.

The cold shallow water, however, had partly revived the poor suffering girl and she began to move her arms a little and moan. And so she was discovered by a poor old man who happened to be passing by. He dragged her clumsily from the water, carried her as well as he could to his house, and there



tended her kindly until in time she recovered.

Meanwhile the Prince had returned from his hunting expedition to find his lampstand in its accustomed place, but with its door wide open. He made enquiries of the servants whether anyone had touched his lampstand, but they were all too frightened to say anything. He had no idea how or why his beloved had disappeared and so great was his grief that he became quite ill. He would not eat and got thinner and thinner until the King and his mother despaired of his life. They sent far and wide for wise men and physicians, all of whom were quite unable to find a cure.

It was now so long since the Prince had eaten a proper meal that one of the King's viziers suggested that a royal proclamation should be made that all the people, high and low, rich and poor, should compete in preparing a dish that would tempt the Prince's appetite. Perhaps, he said, they might in this way induce the Prince to eat something and so keep body and soul together.

Everyone now set to to prepare a dish that would appeal to the royal palate and people of every kind from the highest to the lowest began to arrive at the palace with their offerings. The poor old man who had rescued the girl from the moat heard of the proclamation and hurried home to tell his charge about it. The girl at once busied herself making a thick nourishing soup which she served in a simple earthenware bowl, having first placed at the bottom of the bowl the ring which the Prince had given her. The old man then set off for the palace carrying the bowl of soup. As he went on his way the people laughed unkindly. "Does he imagine," they asked each other, "that he can tempt the Prince, of all people, with his homely soup?" And the old man, hearing their derision said: "Let me too make my offering to the Prince. After all, this soup though simple is

good and it is the best I can afford." And so he continued on his way to the palace.

At the sight of the poor old man faithfully bearing his simple bowl of soup the Prince's heart was touched, and although he had been refusing dainty dishes all the morning, he at once stretched out his hands to take the rough earthenware bowl. He took a spoonful of the soup, and as the wholesome food touched his palate he realised how hungry he was. He continued to enjoy the soup until the bowl was empty, and there, reposing on the bottom, he saw his ring that he had given to his beloved.

At once the heaviness fell from his heart. He drew the old man aside and said: "Tell me, old man, who cooked this soup? It was very good." The old man told the Prince of the beautiful young girl he had rescued, near to death, from the city moat. At once the Prince despatched messengers to bring her to him.

The prince and the girl from the golden lampstand were married without delay and lived happily ever after. The old man was given a place of honour at the court but the wicked Princess spent the rest of her life in loneliness and misery.

## VII

### The Envious Vizier

ONCE upon a time there was a merchant in Yemen by the name of Khoja Bashir. He was an excellent man and he had the honour of being an intimate friend of the King. So much was he in the King's favour that he was constantly at his side. It seemed that the King could not do without him. In any serious or difficult matter that arose, the King always sought the merchant's opinion, and followed his advice. And he rewarded him with many favours.

But the King had a vizier who was an unhappy and envious man. And the vizier hated Khoja Bashir because he was much cleverer than he and was on such intimate terms with the King. He was afraid that he himself might lose the King's favour and that all the advantages of his high office might fall to the merchant.

"It is every man's duty to look after himself," reasoned the vizier, "and to remove his enemies. As long as Khoja Bashir is in the land of the living and enjoys the King's favour, I shall know no peace, for he is a threat to my own security. I must therefore think of a way in which I can make Khoja Bashir lose the King's favour and be exiled from this city or, better still, put to death.

This evil thought was in the vizier's mind day and night, until one morning when he happened to be alone with the King, he thought his opportunity had come to do the merchant some harm.

"O King of high birth and great power," he said, "whose very existence brings glory to the throne, may you ever prosper! May I as vizier venture to put before your Majesty a matter which troubles me?"

"Speak," said the King, and the vizier went on:

"There are two things which may weaken a ruler's authority: one is to value too lightly those people to whom honour and respect are due, and the other is unduly to exalt those who are mean and undeserving. These two things must be kept in mind if royalty and government are to uphold their proper glory. Now, Khoja Bashir, the merchant who enjoys your Majesty's confidences is a man of low birth; what is more he is a criminal and is well known for his sinful ways. His wife too is a bad character who is not to be trusted. It is a matter of astonishment to me that your Majesty, wise and perfect as you are, should have been so careless in this matter."

Now the King did not give his trust lightly and he had many times tested the character of Khoja Bashir. His confidence in the merchant had remained strong, for not once had he found him guilty of the slightest dishonesty or betrayal. He was therefore amazed at what the vizier told him.

"I should not dream of associating with a man of that description," he said. "I have many times tested Khoja Bashir and have always found him to be a good man with no vices. I cannot believe that what you say about him is true and if you cannot prove your accusations you will be punished with the utmost severity."

The vizier much regretted what he had said for now he had to prove his charges. To gain time he asked the King for a week in which to show that what

he had said was true. This was granted and during the week the vizier thought furiously as to how he could fasten some guilt on to the innocent merchant. He finally decided to make his attack through the merchant's wife.

There lived in the city a wicked old hag who was skilled in all sorts of cunning tricks. The vizier sent for her and after promising that she should be well rewarded he said to her :

"I wish you to bring to me in any way you can some token from Khoja Bashir's wife."

"By my soul," answered the old crone, "I shall endeavour my utmost to do you this service ! "

Next day she put on an old and tattered dress and made herself look like some poor destitute creature. In this garb she went to the house of Khoja Bashir as if to beg. When, as she made to enter the house, the porter prevented her, she cried :

"O accursed one ! Have you not heard that he who prevents the poor from begging is a mean wretch and will go to hell ? What can it matter to you if I enter the prosperous house of the Khoja and receive some small alms from him ? "

She tried to push past the porter but he held his staff before her and said : "The Khoja is at present with the King and I can allow no one to enter in his absence."

Upon this the old woman threw herself upon the ground screaming : "The doorkeeper has tried to kill me !" She lay there pretending she was badly wounded, crying, "Alas, my little ones will be orphans ! "

The merchant's wife heard all this commotion and sent out her servants to see what was amiss. Seeing the old woman writhing on the ground, they asked her : "Who are you ? And what has happened ? "

"I am a poor weak old woman," she replied, "and I have come to the prosperous house of the Khoja in

the hope of receiving some help, but the doorkeeper has nearly beaten me to death."

The servants now turned on the porter. "O wretched man," they said, "do you not know that the rich find favour with God through helping the poor? Are you not ashamed to have so cruelly struck this poor beggar-woman?"

The porter declared that the woman was lying and he related the events exactly as they had happened. The servants then reported the matter to their mistress and she, being very kindhearted, said: "Bring the poor creature in by all means, that I may talk with her. Beggars should call forth mercy and pity: to injure them kindles the flame of God's anger."

The servants wrapped the old hag in a carpet and carried her before the Khoja's wife, who held the perfumes of castor, sandal and aloe to her nostrils to revive her. After a while the old crone opened her eyes and gave rein to her deceitful tongue, praising the merchant's wife for her goodness.

"Noble lady," she said, "may you find favour with God and may your future be prosperous. But for your kindness I should have died from the ill-treatment I received from the doorkeeper and my little children would have been orphaned." Then she began to weep, saying: "O unkind fate that brought about the death of my husband! I am now a poor woman and in order to keep my little ones alive I have to do things of which even my slaves would have been ashamed. O noble lady, I was a woman of honour and reputation and of a very high family, but my husband has died and I have lost all my property. Peace and comfort for me are at an end. Every day a thousand of the poor were helped and sustained by my bounty. But one day, I sent a beggar away empty-handed and, since that day, my prosperity has crumbled away and I am now reduced to begging myself. The poor are as spies for the Almighty; give them alms and

treat them well and you rise in favour with God; turn them aside and it is the end of prosperity and comfort. If you refuse a beggar you will have no pleasure. The prayers of the poor will keep ill luck at bay for you. If you wish to prosper always, then give to the poor. O respected and noble lady, it is the fame of Khoja Bashir's generosity that has led me to this place. I came here to seek but a crumb of his generosity, but fate has decreed otherwise. God be praised I must be patient and accept my fate."

By this time the merchant's lady was in tears, so cleverly did the hag unfold her deceitful story. The lady begged the old woman to pardon her for the injuries she had received from the doorkeeper.

"Wait until the Khoja returns home," she added, "and I will give you enough gold and silver to keep you in comfort for the rest of your life so that never again will you need to depend upon the generosity of others. Though you may see great signs of wealth here I may not give you anything without my husband's permission."

And so the old crone waited in the house until evening, but still the Khoja did not return. The hag then again addressed the lady of the house: "Honoured lady," she said, "the Khoja has not yet come and my little children will be waiting for me to provide food for them. They will be anxious and hungry by now."

The lady thereupon removed a robe she was wearing and said: "Here, take this robe. It is my own property. Sell it and provide for your orphans this evening. In the morning I will get something handsome for you from the Khoja."

The old woman took the robe and hastened with it to the house of the vizier, saying to him: "Here is a token from the wife of Khoja Bashir."

The vizier was beside himself with joy and

hastened that very night to the King after the Khoja had departed to say his prayers.

"This will prove the guilt of Khoja Bashir's wife," he said, producing the dress. "She has deceived her husband; she told him she would be alone at home, but in fact she was in my house. Show him this robe and he will recognize it."

The King was greatly displeased and the vizier took his leave.

When Khoja Bashir returned from his prayers, the King said nothing about the incident and the Khoja, as usual, slept in the palace. The following morning, however, the King showed the robe to Khoja Bashir.

"Last night the police met a gang of thieves and took this dress from them," said the King. "I wonder whose it may be?"

As soon as the Khoja's eyes lighted on the garment he recognized it and all the colour drained from his face.

"The dress belongs to one of my household," he said. "But as I have been so long with your Majesty I do not know what has been happening in my own home."

"You fool!" said the King. "Are you not ashamed to have a wife who can so easily deceive you? Last night your wife, whom you thought to be at home, was in the house of the vizier. He brought me this dress as proof. I regret having such a stupid fellow as you among my intimate circle."

Khoja Bashir was thunderstruck, but so convinced was he of his wife's honesty that he suspected that this was a trick of the vizier. He did his best to put this point of view to the King, but by this time the King was so angry that he would not listen. Instead he gave orders for the merchant's execution.

The Khoja had a slave-boy who was devoted to his master and the boy ran straightway to the



merchant's house to inform his wife of what had happened.

"I have done nothing wrong," said the lady. "I give the dress to a beggar-woman so that I might gain favour with the Most High. God will not fail in his promises and he will see that no harm now befalls the Khoja."

She handed the boy a purse of gold, telling him to hand it to the executioners with the request that they delay carrying out the sentence upon the Khoja. This they willingly agreed to do since they had received many favours from the Khoja while he was in the King's service. Meanwhile the Khoja's wife threw a veil over her head and hurried to the palace where she found the vizier. He had come there to see that no attempt was made to rescue the Khoja. When she stood in the presence of the ruler, the lady cried: "O King, I seek justice from the tyranny and wickedness of the vizier!"

"What injustice has the vizier done you?" asked the King.

"For fifteen years I have waited on the vizier," said the lady. "He promised to give me nine hundred dirhams every year, but he gives me nothing. Last night I asked him to pay me what was due to me and he threatened to have me killed."

The vizier was amazed, and on being questioned by the King, he said: "This woman does not speak the truth. I swear by the head of your Majesty that I have never seen her before."

"He has made a false oath by the head of his King," said the lady. "Let him write down his statement and if his treachery should become clear to your Majesty let him be duly punished."

The vizier rose and looked closely at the lady and then wrote a declaration that he did not know the woman and had never seen her before, and that if his statement proved false he was prepared to die.

He then handed this paper to the King.

"Your Majesty," said the lady now, "I am the wife of Khoja Bashir, the merchant, against whom this wicked vizier concocted this plot to satisfy his own hatred and envy. God the Most High has said that whoever uses cunning against his fellows shall himself be defeated by cunning."

She then explained the matter fully, adding: "The vizier has declared that he does not know me and has never seen me before. How then, could I have been in his house last night?"

The King was thus convinced of the treachery of the vizier, who was overwhelmed with shame. The King ordered that Khoja Bashir be brought back immediately from the place of execution, and his wife escorted back to her house. The old hag was brought forward and questioned, but she would not confess until the instruments of torture were brought. She then quickly decided to speak.

"At the request of the vizier," she declared, "I entered the house of the Khoja where that virtuous and modest lady, his wife, took off the robe and gave it to me for the grace of God. I abused her kindness. I was tempted by the reward promised by the vizier. I did not speak the truth. Now I do. But I am only a woman . . . I did not understand what I was doing . . . You cannot punish me . . . !"

The King ordered the vizier and the old hag to be executed. He commended the good conduct of the merchant's wife, begged pardon of Khoja Bashir, bestowed the whole property of the vizier upon him and installed him as vizier.

## VIII

### Irij and His Two Wicked Brothers

KING Feridun of Persia had three sons, and when the young Princes came of age, their father married them to the beautiful daughters of the King of Yemen. He then divided his empire into three parts. To Selim and Tur, his elder sons, he gave the barren and uncivilized provinces of Rum and Turan, but to Irij, his youngest and best loved, he gave Persia, and he himself dwelt with this son to advise and support him in his kingdom.

This division not surprisingly displeased the elder brothers; they felt they had been treated unfairly, and they conspired together to oust Irij from his kingdom and to take it for themselves.

When news of their design reached Persia, Feridun, who was now an old man, realised that he had been unjust. He advised Irij to share peaceably what he had with Selim and Tur and thus avoid strife with his own brothers.

Irij readily agreed and set out at once to visit his brothers, and to assure them that they could enter his kingdom in peace. He alluded to Jemshed's cruel fate, pointing out that it had not profited that monarch to have the whole world at his feet, and declared him-

self willing to hand over part of his domain to his brothers. When he arrived in the kingdom of Turan, travelling with a band of his friends in a simple way without any pomp or ceremony, the hearts of his brothers were touched and softened and it looked as if the three were going to live and rule in peace together.

Now Irij was strikingly handsome and had a natural kingly bearing, and wherever he went all eyes were upon him. Even the soldiers of Selim and Tur acclaimed him as he passed them. This not unnaturally aroused the jealousy of the two brothers, and this smouldering hatred became a roaring fire when they overheard the warriors saying that Irij was such a natural ruler and so far outshone their own Princes that they would gladly march to battle under his banner. Selim and Tur resolved that their brother must be put to death.

The very next day Tur picked a quarrel with Irij, blaming him for having accepted Persia instead of one of the two barren kingdoms to the north which were perpetually harrassed by the Turks. He refused to listen to the soft words of his peaceably inclined brother, and, working himself up into a fury, ran upon him with a dagger and slew him.

Then these cruel brothers embalmed the head of the young Prince and sent it to Feridun.

The old monarch was waiting in some anxiety for the return of his favourite son, and his loyal subjects had arranged a splendid reception for their young ruler. Bands of music, dancing girls and processions of men on horseback leading riderless steeds, were all made ready to welcome Irij. When the emissary of Selim and Tur arrived bearing his grim trophy and the horrible truth was known, the grief was unimaginable.

Feridun, crazed with sorrow, ordered all his subjects to drape themselves in black. The parchment

of the joyful drums was broken and the waving banners were torn asunder, as the King buried the head of his beloved son, and called on Heaven for vengeance. And the mighty gods heard the prayer of the agonized father.

Irij had no son to avenge him, but when his little daughter grew up and was married, she became the mother of Minuchihr, and her child was said by all greatly to resemble both Feridun and his ill-fated heir.

Feridun adored his great-grandson, and did everything to fit him to rule over Persia. The boy was indeed beloved of the whole nation, the soldiers constantly affirming that they were ready to follow him to the death.

Feridun had not been idle during all these years, for he had collected a vast army and had trained it to such a pitch of efficiency that his wicked sons became seriously alarmed.

From time to time reports reached them of the bravery of the young Minuchihr, and once again they conspired together. They sent a messenger to Feridun bearing magnificent presents. But the old man looked coldly upon the costly offerings and enquired of the envoy with what message he was charged by his masters.

The nobleman then explained that Selim and Tur were deeply penitent concerning the murder of Irij and begged for pardon. They declared that the Evil Spirit had persuaded them to do the wicked deed against their will. They asked their father, as a proof of forgiveness, to send his great-grandson to them; and, if Feridun wished, they would resign their kingdoms to him.

But the aged King was not to be deceived by fair words. He bade the envoy tell his masters that Minuchihr would indeed visit them, but that it would be at the head of a great army. To let him see that this was no idle boast, he showed the nobleman a host of

the mightiest warriors of his kingdom and then sent him and the presents away with angry contempt.

The brothers were much vexed, but, having decided to strike the first blow, they marched forth at the head of their armies towards Persia. Feridun was by no means perturbed at this move. He said that the invaders were but as lions walking straight into the traps prepared for them, and he exerted himself to see that all was ready in his own powerful army.

And the great forces met face to face, and fought desperately from sunrise to sunset, the army of Minuchihr winning the day, for the gods were on the side of the Persian host. Both Selim and Tur were slain, and after the battle the armies of the two wicked brothers gave their allegiance to the conqueror, who returned with great triumph to old Feridun.

Upon the death of King Feridun, Minuchihr ascended the thrones of Persia, Rum, and Turan, and observed all the counsels of his great-grandfather, being ever most devout in the worship of the gods who had helped him in all his dangers.

## IX

### The Poor Man who became a Fortune-teller

ONCE upon a time there was a poor man who earned an honest living selling goods in the bazaar. One day his wife went to the public baths and while she was there a lady arrived to whom the bath attendants showed unusual respect. The lady glanced haughtily about her and declared that she wished to have the bath to herself. The bath attendants thereupon ordered all the other women present to leave the place and they hastily complied. The bazaar-seller's wife was greatly put out at this and, as she left, enquired who the lady was and why everyone hastened so to do her bidding.

"That lady," replied the bath attendant, "is no less a person than the wife of the King's Fortune-Teller-in-Chief."

Still feeling much annoyance, the woman returned home and told her husband what had happened.

"Why must I be married to a nobody like you?" she said unkindly. "Why cannot you be a fortune-teller so that I too may be treated with respect?"

"But," said her poor husband, "how could I be a fortune-teller? I do not know how to divine or cast horoscopes. That is a foolish idea you have."

"Either you become a fortune-teller," retorted his wife, "or I shall ask for a divorce."

So the poor husband procured a divining-board and dice and, thus set up, seated himself in the street outside the public baths. Feeling very unhappy and unsure of himself, there he sat waiting to see what fate would bring.

Now it so happened that the King's daughter was in the bath at that time. She had taken off a valuable ring she was wearing and had handed in to one of her slave-girls for safe-keeping. The slave-girl, seeing a convenient little hole in the wall, had placed the ring there and had poked a wisp of hair into the hole to mark the spot.

When the King's daughter was ready to put the ring on once again the slave-girl, try as hard as she could, was quite unable to remember what she had done with it. The Princess was furious and declared that if the ring was not produced at once she would have the girl beaten. Terrified of the Princess's anger, the slave-girl ran from the baths, and as she ran, caught sight of the fortune-teller sitting there with his divining board and dice. "O Fortune-Teller, help me please!" she cried. "Divine for me and see where the Princess's ring is."

The poor fortune-teller had no idea what he should do or say next, but he listened attentively to her story, meanwhile shaking the dice and gazing at the dice and gazing at the board as if he knew what he was doing. Then he raised his eyes to look at the girl and saw a little tear in the cloak she was wearing and through it he could see the girl's hair. At his wits' end as to what he should say or do next, he murmured: "I see a little hole, and in the hole some hair."

No sooner were the words out of his mouth than the slave-girl remembered where she had put the ring. She ran back into the baths, retrieved the ring and returned it joyfully to the Princess, telling how



she had been helped by the fortune-teller. The Princess was most impressed and related the story to her father, the King, who at once ordered that the amazing fellow be brought to him.

The fortune-teller was accordingly brought to the King's presence. He was given money, a horse and a robe of honour and was appointed Court Fortune-Teller.

But very soon he was once more put to the test, for the royal Treasury was robbed and the King commanded the fortune-teller to see that the thieves were found. The poor man was now badly frightened but had the wit to ask the King for forty days in which to accomplish his task. Then in great distress he went home to his wife.

"How am I to find the thieves?" he wailed. "If I fail I shall assuredly be put to death. We shall have to flee before the forty days are up. See what your ambition has done for us."

The poor man then put forty dates into a jar and told his wife to bring him one date every evening. When the jar was empty they would have to flee.

Now the thieves who had robbed the Treasury numbered forty and they knew that the King had ordered the fortune-teller to find them. So on the first night one of the thieves climbed on to the roof of the fortune-teller's house to listen and try to find out what he was doing. While he was there he heard the wife say: "Here is the first of the forty." She was of course referring to dates, but the thief was badly frightened and hurried back to his leader to tell him that the fortune-teller had known that he was there.

The following evening the leader sent two men to listen at the fortune-teller's house and they heard the wife say: "That's two of the forty," and so it went on until the fortieth evening arrived. On this the last evening, the leader himself decided to go and investigate. It so happened that the wife had kept the

biggest date to the last. Handing it to her husband she said: "Now we've come to the last one and it's the biggest one of all." At this the robber chief was so perturbed that he rushed into the fortune-teller and undertook to hand over to him all the lost treasure provided he did not reveal to the King the thieves' names.

Filled with joy and thankfulness the fortune-teller returned to the Palace bearing with him all the money and valuables that had been stolen from the Treasury. And once more the King was mightily impressed and rewarded him with further honours.

Then one day when out hunting, the King tried twice to catch a locust and failed; at the third attempt he caught it and held it hidden in his hand. Just to amuse himself he rode up to the fortune-teller and asked him to tell him what he was holding in his hand. The poor man, greatly fearing the King's anger if he should fail, nervously cast his dice, and thinking of his own experience, murmured: "You escaped with your life once, little fellow, and luck was with you the second time, but now you are trapped in a King's hand."

Once more the King was greatly impressed with the cleverness of his fortune-teller and continued to load him with honours.

But it was getting too much for the fortune-teller; he lived in dread that a problem would be set him on the morrow for which he could find no answer. Surely his luck could not hold out much longer. He decided that he must somehow put an end to this worrying state of affairs. And one day when he was sitting in his bath the idea came to him that he would pretend to be mad and thus get himself dismissed from the King's service. He straight way dashed from his bath, just as he was, and quite naked, scampered into the palace, made straight for the audience chamber, picked the King up in his arms

and rushed out with him. No sooner were they outside the chamber when there was a resounding crash and the roof fell in.

"My faithful, wonderful Fortune-Teller," exclaimed the King "You divined that the roof of my audience chamber was about to collapse and rushed straight from your bath to save my life. You shall be richly rewarded."

And further wealth and honours were heaped upon the poor man who now became the King's Fortune-Teller-in-Chief.

As for his wife, she went on the very next day to the public bath and to her great satisfaction saw there the wife of the King's former Fortune-Teller-in-Chief. She gave orders that she was to leave immediately as she wished to have the bath to herself.

## X

### Zal and the Wonder-bird

THE most powerful warrior and one of the most loyal and trusted nobles at the court of King Minuchihr was called Zahon. Zahon enjoyed great riches and honour but, alas, he was childless. There was no heir to carry on his great name. As the years passed he continued to pray that the gods might yet grant him a son, and at last, when he was already an old man, his wish was fulfilled. But his joy in this happy event was dimmed, for the boy, though beautiful and strong, had snow-white hair.

All the Persians, who admired Zahon for his valour, pitied him on account of the boy, for they believed that the child must be of the race of the Demons, and would bring his father and the land of Persia nothing but misfortune.

And Zahon, hearkening to the voice of the people, was much distressed and determined to make away with the baby, who was called Zal. Accordingly, he took the poor child right up to the top of the Elburz mountains far from any living creatures except the ibex, the hill leopard, the wild sheep and the birds of the air, and left him there to die.

But the gods did not intend that Zal should perish.

The Simurgh, a marvellous creature, half bird, half beast, and endowed with great wisdom, was flying over the mountains, and seeing a little baby lying on the barren rocks, swooped down and carried it off in its strong talons to its sandalwood nest.

As it flew back up the rocky peak a supernatural voice addressed the Simurgh, telling it to cherish the young Zal.

"Hurt not the child thou bearest, O Wonder-bird," said the voice, "for great destinies await him. His son will be the light of the East, the star of Persia, the Champion of the World."

The worthy Simurgh therefore guarded and cared for the deserted child, even teaching him many languages as he grew up.

The years passed, and the child grew old enough to play about the mountain-top and was dimly seen by those below; and the tale passed among the people that up on the mountain-top the Simurgh guarded a living boy.

Meanwhile, old Zahon was living a life apart, feeling lonely and forsaken, for the gods had not given him another son in place of the one whom he had deserted. Furthermore, he was constantly haunted by the thought of the helpless babe he had left to perish. He thought sometimes that in spite of all his riches and high position his life had been a failure, and one night he fell asleep even more under a cloud than usual and he had a strange dream.

When he awoke he went straight to the magicians, who told him that the dream meant that his son was alive, and had not been devoured by wild beasts as all had supposed. Zahon, now feeling his heart burn with love for the child he had so despised, sent his servants into the mountains to search for Zal. But they returned empty-handed.

And yet again Zahon had a dream. He saw a young-man of beautiful countenance but with snow-white

hair, on horseback at the head of a great army. At his right hand rode a holy man who addressed Zahon in reproachful tones saying that the warrior was his deserted son, that the gods had protected him, and would make his name famous throughout the world.

This time Zahon himself set off to the Elburz mountains, and on their rocky slopes knelt in prayer to the gods, begging them to forgive his crime and restore to him his son. And as he wept and lamented the Simurgh heard his cries.

Telling Zal that his father had come to seek him, and that he must now go to his own people, the Wonder-bird carried the boy on its great wings down to where the broken-hearted Zahon was weeping.

"Here is he whom you come to seek, whom you so cruelly left to perish," said the Simurgh. "Guard him well."

The boy, however, wept at the thought of leaving his strange foster-parent, but the great Simurgh solemnly blessed him and bade him never to forget the home of his childhood and the nurse who had loved him. He then took from his breast three feathers and gave them to the boy.

"Take these," said he, "and whenever you are in danger cast one of these on to the fire. Then I will come to help you."

Then the Wonder-bird went back to his sandalwood nest and the stars and the winds, and Zahon, rejoicing, tenderly bore his son back home, clothed him, and with the utmost affection set him among the Princes of the court.

King Minuchihr was deeply interested in the young boy, and received him graciously, presenting him with a helm and mace of gold. The wise men of the court, summoned to read his horoscope, foretold that he would be the greatest warrior of his generation. This information greatly delighted the monarch, who further presented him with fine horses and appointed



The Wonder-bird carried the boy on its great wings.

his father to be governor of the provinces of Zabulistan, Kabul and Ind.

As time went on, no one in the country was more beloved or more universally praised than whitehaired Zal. His strength and fighting skill were extraordinary. There appeared to have entered into his being in those early days on the mountain-top a strange power which seemed to foreshadow a great and splendid future.

The youth spent his time in improving his mind, seeking ever to converse with the wisest men of Zabulistan, so that when Zahon was obliged to go with an army to subdue the troublesome Demons of Mazanderan, he found that his son was well able to rule over the province during his absence.

And all the people praised the wisdom and justice displayed by the young Governor, and Zal, finding that everything was quiet in Zabulistan, made a tour through the provinces in his care, arriving at last at Kabul, where he pitched his camp by a river not far from the city.

Mihrab, King of Kabul, was of the detested race of Zohak, but, as his grandfather had submitted to Feridun, he was permitted to hold his kingdom on payment of an annual tribute.

Now, Mihrab had a daughter, Rudabeh, whose loveliness was widely acclaimed. It soon came to Zal's ears that this Princess, with skin whiter than ivory, hair dark as the raven's wing, and cheeks rosy as a pomegranate flower, was living in the fortress-like palace of the town, and very naturally he longed to see her, but he resolved to put the thought from his mind as he knew that the King of Persia would be angry were he to accept hospitality from a descendant of the wicked Zohak.

Mihrab, however, had been greatly impressed with the handsome appearance and bravery of the young Governor and little thinking what effect his words



would have, he gave his wife and daughter such an account of Zal, that the lovely Rudabeh at once fell in love with him, and horrified her maidens by telling them of her affection for this white-haired youth whom she had never seen. They did their utmost to make her forget him, but everything was in vain. Rudabeh said she would die if she could not marry Zal, and implored her attendants to help her to meet the object of her affections.

When they saw that she was really in earnest, they decided to help their beloved mistress. They accordingly made their way to the camp of Zal, and began to gather roses, which were growing by the stream close to the tent of the hero.

Zal, who was disturbed by this intrusion, sent a servant to ask their business. The man returned to his master and told him that they were the slaves of the lovely Rudabeh, and that should it be found that he was equal in birth to the Princess, she was ready to be his wife.

Zal's desire to meet the beautiful lady was at once rekindled, and he loaded the slaves with gifts of jewels and silken garments to take back to their mistress.

Rudabeh was overjoyed but she still could see no prospect of meeting the hero, for it was impossible for him to come to the palace without the knowledge of her father and mother.

Her servants, however, once more came to her assistance and devised a plan. Their mistress was to ask leave of her parents to go for a few days to a beautiful castle in the country, and to this retreat young Zal could be invited to meet her.

The plan went forward and one evening after sunset Zal stood beneath the balcony of his lady-love. Rudabeh leant over the balustrade, and they talked together eagerly, but soon the darkness of evening fell and they could no longer see each other. Zal implored her to send down a rope by which he might

climb to her. The Princess thereupon unwound the braids of her magnificent hair, sending the longest braid down to Zal. Guided upward by this precious rope, Zal reached Rudabeh's balcony.

"You alone, O Rudabeh, shall be my wife," said Zal. "Our love, alas, must be kept secret, for you are of the hated race of Zohak. I must take the advice of my councillors before seeking your hand in marriage."

"My own beloved," answered Rudabeh, "all my happiness is in your hands. The mightiest king of the earth shall woo me in vain, for my heart belongs in life and death only to you."

Then Zal, after tenderly embracing her, tore himself away, and the next mornig assembled a council of the wise men of Zabulistan, and told them of his intended marriage.

They too were astounded to hear that their young chieftain wished to marry a maiden of the hated race of the Serpent King, and advised him to send a messenger with a letter at once to his father. This envoy arrived some weeks later, hot and dusty, at Zahon's camp in far-off Mazanderan.

The old warrior was at first thunderstruck at the news, but he called the magicians together to consult them and was overjoyed when they told him that the gods would bless the marriage of his son with Rudabeh and would give them a child who would be the greatest warrior the world had ever known. He sent a kind message back to the impatient Zal, but said that the betrothal must be kept a secret until the war with the Demons was over, and he could himself lay the matter before King Minuchihr.

For the present, therefore, the lovers did not venture to meet again, but daily exchanged messages through emissaries. But it was hard to keep such a big secret, and one unlucky day the Princess's mother found out that there was some mystery in the air. She went to

her daughter's room and questioned her, and the girl at once said that she was engaged to be married to Zal, and that she loved him more than all the world.

Her mother was not angry when she knew that Zahon approved; but when Rudabeh's father was told he flew into a violent rage.

"The Persian King will most certainly deprive me of my kingdom," he shouted. "I may even be put to death, and all because of my daughter's folly."

At last, however, his wife calmed him and he promised not to hurt his daughter if she would come into his presence. Rudabeh appeared, proud and without fear, dressed in her most beautiful clothes, laden with all her jewels, and not looking in the least like a penitent.

"I am betrothed to the noblest man in the world!" she exclaimed, and her face was so full of gladness that her angry father did not have it in his heart to blame her for thus giving her love without his consent.

Meanwhile Zahon had returned in triumph from conquering the Demons of Mazanderan, and when he told King Minuchihr about his son's betrothal, the King was greatly angered. He declared that all the work of the good Feridun would be brought to nought if the descendants of the Serpent King got the mastery in Persia; and he commanded Zahon to lead an army against Kabul and utterly destroy the city and its inhabitants.

Mihrab heard of Minuchihr's design through spies, and his hatred again rose against his daughter, for he knew that he had but a small army and could never resist the vast hosts of the Persian monarch. He threatened to kill poor Rudabeh, but once more his wife succeeded in calming him, and in the end persuaded him to send her to Zahon at Kabul with gifts of horses, jewels and slaves.

Zahon was amazed at the riches brought to his

feet, but for some time he would not accept them because he feared the anger of King Minuchihr. Eventually his scruples were overcome by the great love he bore his son, and avowing that Zal's happiness meant more to him than the displeasure of any monarch, he told the anxious mother he would do his utmost to arrange the marriage.

Then Zal himself went to the court of the King of Persia to plead his own cause, and when Minuchihr heard that the astrologers were in favour of the wedding, he gave his consent, and Rudabeh became the happy wife of the white-haired hero.

After all their fears and disappointments they belonged to one another at last, and their great love seemed only to become stronger and stronger as the weeks and months glided by.

But, alas, Rudabeh fell ill, so ill that the doctors and magicians said they could do no more for her. Zal, despairing, faced the prospect of losing his beloved wife. As day succeeded day, Rudabeh became ever thinner and paler, until she was too weak to move from her couch. The whole kingdom of Zabulistan mourned her approaching end.

And one day as Zal sat beside her he burst into a flood of tears, and beat his breast, and tore his rich garments, calling out in his anguish: "Ah, why did not the Simurgh leave me to starve on the mountains in my childhood! Why did it save me for such a sad fate as this!"

And as he spoke, the name of the wondrous bird brought back a host of memories to his mind and he suddenly thought of the feathers, its parting gift, which he had kept by him unheeded till now. And to Rudabeh's astonishment he sprang up and rushed from her room, returning in a few moments with something in his hand, which he threw upon the fire.

All at once a great darkness fell. Zal held his wife in his arms and told her not to be afraid. And in a

moment the room seemed to be filled with a huge, winged creature which spoke with the voice of a man: "Why give way to all this unmeasured grief?" it enquired of Zal. "I can cure your wife, and, moreover, you will before long be the happy father of a boy who will be called the Wonder of the World. Follow my advice and all will go well."

After telling the hero what to do for Rudabeh, and presenting him with another feather from its wing, the Wonder-bird departed as mysteriously as it had come, and the young Princess soon recovered her health and spirits.

And the prophecy of the Simurgh came true, for a child was born to the beautiful Rudabeh, so big that he looked a year old on the day of his birth, and it is said that at eight years of age he was as strong as the most powerful warrior in the kingdom.

Rustem was his name, and the whole world rang with praise of the wonderful boy who was of such beauty and strength that the Persians used to call him the Shield of Persia and compare him with the gods themselves.

## XI

### The Blind Beggar

THERE was once a blind man of Tabriz who was very poor. He used to go begging from house to house, saying as he went : "He who turns aside from the paths of justice shall suffer misfortune."

One day when he was going about his business he stopped outside the house of a rich man to beg and recited the usual words. The master of the house took pity on him and gave him some money, and as he did so he said : "I have often heard you repeat these same words. Tell me, why do you always say this thing?" And the blind beggar told him this story.

His father had been originally a hawker and, being always honest, pious and just, he did well in business and his position gradually improved. Indeed, his wealth so increased that in due time he became a dealer in jewels. At this point in his life he journeyed to Bahrayn with some other merchants and there he purchased a great quantity of pearls. The business he was able to transact with these pearls on his return home made him one of the richest men in the country. When he had thus reached the zenith of his career he died. His son inherited all his wealth and decided to follow the same occupation.

"However, instead of being content with his good fortune, he became greedy for money. Indeed, in his desire for more and more worldly goods he even descended to dishonesty in his business dealings when he saw a chance of making more money that way. He knew what he was doing, of course, and fully realized that it was wrong, but he could not hold his greediness in check. He was in fact in the habit of starting business in the bazaar before sunrise, although it was considered in very bad taste to do so.

One day, just when he had opened his shop, there came to him a poor, sick-looking man whose appearance struck him as somehow sinister. He began by praising God and then drew a precious pearl from his pocket, saying:

"Young man, I was once very rich, but a sudden bout of ill-fortune made me penniless overnight and all that has remained of my former wealth is this one pearl. My family are destitute and I am now obliged to offer this pearl for sale so that I may be able to provide for my family until fortune smiles upon us once more."

The merchant took the pearl in his hand and could see at a glance that it was extremely valuable. Indeed, he was astonished at its beauty, purity and splendour. However, practised as he was by this time in the cunning of the trade, he turned contemptuously to the man and said:

"This pearl is by no means as precious as you suppose, but having regard to the difficult circumstances in which you find yourself I will buy it. Please name the price."

Having said this the merchant proceeded to busy himself with other things to give the man the impression that he did not care whether he had the pearl or not, although in truth he was aflame with greed to possess the pearl and his one fear was that it might fall into the hands of another dealer.

"Dear friend," replied the stranger, "although you see me now as a poor man, there was a time when I presented many such pearls as gifts to my friends. I do not want to be difficult about the sale of one single pearl, but I assure you I am well aware of its true value. I have come to your shop and I have no wish to go round to other dealers. You are an experienced dealer in pearls: your own skill and knowledge will tell you what is a fair price for this one. Please offer me what you think is fair and reasonable and I will accept it."

He then handed the pearl back to the merchant, who considered for a moment whether he should offer him half its value. But his evil nature prevailed even over this and with a show of bad grace he took twenty dirhams from his pocket and placed them before the man. He took the money and, sighing deeply, murmured: "What justice and humanity!" and went on his way.

The merchant rejoiced at having thus obtained for twenty dirhams a gem which would have been cheap at a thousand. He congratulated himself on his shrewdness and never thought for a moment that one day he might have to pay for his dishonesty.

Two days after this transaction, while he was once more opening his shop at sunrise, well before any other inhabitants of the bazaar were astir, one of the principal citizens passed by on horseback. The merchant was at that moment arranging his goods, and he thrust his head out of the door to see who the early rider was. At this the horse shied, the rider was thrown violently to the ground and was killed instantly. A crowd of attendants who were following fell on the merchant, beat him with sticks and then tied his hands. The other shopkeepers, who did not like him because of his grasping methods of business, began to gather round. They were really delighted to see him in difficulties, and although he tried to





At this the horse shied.

explain what had actually happened no one would listen to him. One of the traders called out: "This is the sort of thing that happens when people grow rich by dishonest means." The other shopkeepers noisily showed their agreement and the conversation so developed that before many more moments had passed all those gathered round the merchant were convinced that he was guilty of killing the man. Meanwhile the police had arrived on the scene and he was bound and taken before the Amir of Damascus, who was himself a wicked man. The merchant's plight greatly amused the Amir and he took much delight in his distress. The captive was given no chance to explain but was summarily condemned to be beheaded. There were, however, some bystanders who pleaded that he might be spared this supreme penalty, and he was instead fined a thousand gold dinars.

Through this misfortune the merchant was deprived of more than half of his property, and although this was a crushing blow to him he did his best to pull his fortunes together again. In fact his greed was by no means diminished by this misadventure and he continued to do all he could to increase his wealth and add to his possessions.

One day when he was sitting in his shop, two well-dressed women came along. One had a baby in her arms, the other carried a casket. They both stopped just outside the shop. The woman with the child in her arms took some gold ashrafis from her pocket and, handing them to the other, said: "Give this money to Haji Jalal Kazvini for the articles which you bought yesterday, and say that I shall send him the balance tomorrow. Tell him also that he must quickly procure the jewels which are required, because the wedding is to take place in ten days. I will wait here for you. Come back quickly with the answer."

When the woman had departed on her errand the

merchant felt desire for gain strong within him, having seen the gold ashrafs and heard about an imminent wedding. So he said to the woman who remained : "Tell me, O lady of modesty, where have you sent your companion?" To which she replied : "The daughter of a citizen is to be given in marriage to the Vizier's son, and we, being attached to the household of the young lady, have come to the bazaar to buy fine linen and jewels. Yesterday we bought linen of Haji Jalal and have now sent him the price, with orders to procure the jewels as soon as possible."

On hearing this the merchant was already handling large sums of money in his imagination and he said to the lady:

"Noble and honoured lady, I have many precious jewels. Please allow me to show them to you so that you may make your choice; I am sure we shall have no difficulty in agreeing on the price."

"The lady for whom the jewels are being procured is very difficult to please," answered the woman. "Over the past few days many jewels have been submitted to her but she will only consider the most precious gems. Furthermore, we have already bargained with Haji Jalal and bought jewels from him and he has treated us very fairly."

"If I were in his place," replied the merchant, "I should also be very happy to gain your custom, for it is very good for business to have profitable dealings with great people." But the lady only said: "We shall see."

Meanwhile her companion had returned and she now handed her a string of valuable pearls. She glanced at the merchant, whispered something to her companion, and then said aloud: "Since you have brought them, let them remain so." And turning to the merchant she said: "Show us your jewels."

The merchant produced a small box which

contained his principal stock. He showed the ladies the most rare and beautiful pearls and gems he had, and stated the price of each. He also fixed the price of the pearl he had bought from the stranger for twenty dirhams at two thousand dirhams.

The lady looked at the pearls and then closed the box, saying: "I cannot say whether these jewels will meet with approval." She then took out her writing tablet and wrote something which she handed, with the box, to her companion, at the same time saying to the merchant: "I shall remain here while the lady of the house makes her choice. If you wish you may send someone with my friend to see where the house is." The merchant had a faithful servant whom he sent and the woman who remained sat down in the shop.

While she was waiting thus two men in the bazaar began to quarrel and when they reached the door of the shop they drew their swords and began to fight. Before long a great crowd had gathered and the Amir's men came to lead away the contestants and those who had witnessed the affair. They ordered the shopkeepers to follow and dragged the merchant along with them too. Meanwhile the woman, who was still sitting in the shop with the child in her arms, said: "Do not worry about the shop, I will look after it until you return."

However, when the merchant was a few paces away it occurred to him that the woman might deceive him, so he said to the butcher, whose shop was next to his: "Please keep an eye on that woman." He, of course, knew nothing of what was going on and just thought the merchant meant him to see that the shop was all right. And so he agreed.

However, as some time had passed since the merchant's servant had gone off with the other woman and the box of jewels the merchant was still full of anxiety and it was with a heavy heart that he

made his way to the Amir's court. By the time he arrived there all the witnesses had been examined and discharged. He was taken before the Amir to give evidence, but was so distracted that his mind was not on what he was saying and his evidence did not agree with that of the other witnesses.

The Amir smiled. "This without a doubt is the wretch who killed the man!" he said, and the people echoed his verdict murmuring, "So it is!"

"He is guilty," continued the Amir, "and that is why his evidence does not correspond with that of the other witnesses. He is a worthless fellow and must be severely punished."

As the merchant was led out of the palace he gave a large sum of money to the officials, asking them to take bail of suitable persons and set him at liberty.

When he returned to his shop he found his servant there alone, crying and in great distress. The woman had gone. He asked the servant what had become of the jewels and the woman whom he had accompanied. He in turn asked what had happened to the woman he had left in the shop with the merchant. The merchant told him that he had asked the butcher to keep an eye on her. He pressed him to tell him where he had been and what he had done with the box of jewels.

"You gave the box to the woman and ordered me simply to follow her so as to learn where the house was," replied the servant, "and this I did. I went with her from the bazaar and passed through several streets until we reached the street of the Forty Virgins. She stopped at a house outside which a number of respectable people were sitting and bade me be seated until she came out again. The woman entered the house and I continued to wait outside. I waited until near noon, but she did not reappear. When it was midday and I heard the voice of the muezzin calling the people to prayer and saw crowds entering the

house, I supposed that someone had died there and that the people were going in to offer their sympathy to the relatives. After a while they all came out again. I asked one of the people whether the woman who went in there ever intended to come out. The man laughed and said: 'Whose house do you think this is? And what woman do you mean? Step inside, there is nothing to stop you.' I stood up and, full of misgivings, I passed through the doorway. I walked inside and found I was inside a mosque where I saw people engaged in prayer. On the opposite side was another door through which people were also entering and leaving. Then I realised in a flash that the woman must have passed through it. I went out by that door and looked around me. There were several women like her walking about, but as there had been nothing striking about her dress by which I might have recognized her, and as I did not know her name, I realized there was little chance of finding her. I wandered miserably about the streets for some time and then, all hope of finding her gone, I returned to the shop."

As the servant's story unfolded, the merchant felt that he was about to choke with grief. He nearly went out of his mind. He went to the butcher and asked him what had happened to the woman whom he had left in his care.

"You did not leave a woman in my care," replied the butcher. "You asked me to look after your shop. When you had gone I noticed a woman sitting there with a child in her arms and I asked her what she wanted, and she said: 'I want a sum of money from the jeweller.' A little later she brought the child to me and said: 'I will leave the child here until I come back.' She went away and the child is still here in the shop."

The merchant went to look at the child and when he lifted the veil from its face he discovered that it

was a plaster figure. He then lost his temper with the butcher.

"I entrusted this woman to your care," he shouted, "and you must find her. She was staying in my shop as a pledge for more than three thousand tomans worth of jewels."

"I'm not your servant," said the butcher, "why did you not take care of the woman yourself?"

By this time the merchant was so beside himself with rage that he picked up the great butcher's knife which was lying near his hand and threw it at the butcher. It wounded him in the face. At the sound of the commotion the other shopkeepers rushed in, grabbed the merchant and dragged him to the Amir. He at once ordered the merchant's execution. But some people said: "This man is mad. Do not kill him. Let his possessions be confiscated and let him be expelled from the city as a warning to others."

Everything the merchant had was taken from him and he was driven from the city, poor and naked. When he reached the desert he lost his way and wandered about, thirsty and hungry, for ten days. When he was near to utter despair a man met him, mounted him on a camel and led him to the main road. He then asked the merchant whether he recognized him.

"Your voice seems to be that of a friend," replied the merchant.

"I am the man who sold you the pearl for twenty dirhams to try your honesty," declared the stranger, "and I have it with me now."

Putting his hand into his wallet he drew forth the pearl.

"Know you," he said, "that I am King Akabil, and that several thousands of genii are subject to me. It is my occupation to go about in cities and bazaars in various disguises to discover whether people are honest in their dealings. When I find an upright

man I remain his friend and his helper; when I find a dishonest man I punish him. You should know that it is wrong to cheat your fellow human beings. Due to your deceitfulness your immense wealth has vanished overnight."

The merchant began to weep, but the man said :

"It is no good feeling sorry now." He then disappeared from sight.

And so the once rich merchant came to Tabriz as a poor man and continued to wander about in poverty and grief, bitterly regretting his dishonesty. Finally he went blind, and perforce begging became his trade. And as he went about begging he always chanted the same words to warn high and low, that if they departed from the paths of honesty and justice they too would become exiles from the land of peace and prosperity.



## XII

### How Rustem Became the Hero of Persia

AMONG the animals at the court of King Minuchihr of Persia was a great, savage white elephant. This vicious beast was the especial charge of the old warrior Zahon, who kept him fastened with a heavy chain. One night, however, to Zahon's terror and dismay, the elephant broke loose and charged about the town, trampling upon and killing all who came in its path.

The boy Rustem, son of white-haired Zal, and grandson of proud old Zahon, asleep within the castle, was awakened by the cries and shrieks of the terrified townsfolk. He at once seized an iron mace and rushed to the castle gates to enquire of the guards what the matter was. The soldiers guarding the gates told him of the elephant's escape but tried to stop him from venturing forth as they feared for his safety. But Rustem broke the heavy iron lock with his own hands and rushed out into the streets.

Yells of terror guided him quickly to the spot where the elephant was trampling men and women in the dust, and in another moment the enormous brute charged straight at the boy, waving its trunk angrily and roaring aloud. Rustem waited until it

was quite close to him, and then struck it. To the amazement of the spectators, the huge creature, after staggering for a moment, fell down dead in a massive heap. Then the grateful people returned fervent thanks to the gods who had sent them such a champion in their need.

Zal felt that after such an achievement it was time for Rustem to leave his mother's side and go out into the world. He therefore charged his son to go and take a fort on Mount Sipund, held by evil men who had slain the father of Zahan. This castle, besides being well-nigh impregnable in itself, was surrounded by a great expanse of desert, and the warrior Zahan had never succeeded in his assaults upon it.

Rustem took up the challenge with fervour. He and his companions disguised themselves as merchants, and loading a string of camels with bags of salt, set out for the fort.

The inhabitants of Sipund happened to be in need of salt at the time. They welcomed the caravan warmly, and when they had bought large supplies from the pretended merchants they gave them lodging for the night.

But as soon as it was dark, the Persian warriors threw off the long robes which they wore as merchants, and advanced to the house of the Governor. The alarm was given, and a desperate fight ensued between the people of Sipund and Rustem's followers; but the son of white-haired Zal fought so skillfully that not one man escaped from the fortress alive. In the Governor's palace, the Persians found wealth beyond their wildest dreams and, loading up their camels with treasure in place of the salt they had brought with them, they burnt the castle to the ground, and returned home to Zabulistan.

Thus did Rustem avenge the death of his great-grandfather.

Zal and Rudabeh welcomed their son home with

exceeding joy, for they saw in this but the first of many mighty campaigns the young hero would lead, to the glory of Persia.

When at the age of one hundred and twenty, good King Minuchihr passed to his last rest, Persia entered into a period of danger and unrest in which the strength and valour of her great hero were much needed and sorely tried.

For Nauder, the son of Minuchihr, who now ascended the throne, in spite of all the wise advice of his father, ruled so unjustly that the nation nearly rose in revolt, and the King of Turan, seeing how Persia was unsettled by internal strife, raised a large army to invade the country. At the head of this army he put his son, Afrasiyab.

Just as the Turanians started on their march into Persia, old Zahon, the invincible warrior, was called to his last rest, and the white-haired Zal had to assume leadership of the Persian army. The Turanians were in great high spirits, as they considered Zal no match for their own Prince Afrasiyab.

Their hopes of victory were soon realized, for before long a terrible engagement took place, in which the Persians were utterly routed. Their King Nauder was taken prisoner by Prince Afrasiyab, who at once put him to death and himself became monarch of Persia.

Zal, however, had no intention of letting the Turanian conqueror have everything his own way, and, hearing that Prince Kai-Kobad, a noble descendant of the good Feridun endowed with every virtue, was living in retirement on the slopes of the Elburz mountains, he sent Rustem to offer him the crown.

Prince Kai-Kobad was by no means surprised at the object of Rustem's visit, for he had had a strange dream only the previous night. He had dreamed that two white Persian hawks had flown down to him,

carrying a golden diadem in their beaks, which they had placed upon his head, thus signifying that he was to reign over Persia. Accordingly, he accompanied Rustem to Zabulistan, where Zal had gathered a great army, and the soldiers received him with wild enthusiasm, loudly acclaiming him as their King.

Kai-Kobad at once appointed young Rustem one of his generals. The boy hero was highly delighted at the honour, but told his father that he must have a mace and a horse of his own before he entered upon his new office. Zal, therefore, gave him the enormously heavy iron club formerly used by old Zahon in his battles, and told him to take his choice of a steed. But this was not an easy matter, for none of Zal's horses could bear the weight of the hero when armed with his mace. Rustem spent several days roaming about the grassy uplands where the steeds fed, but found no animal that would suit him.

At last his eye fell on a beautiful roan foal, but the grooms advised him to move with caution, as the young horse had Demon blood in its veins. Rustem, however, paid no attention to their warnings, and, swinging his lasso, soon caught the roan by the neck.

The horse, bounding about wildly, half-mad with fear, was so strong that he pulled Rustem along after him. However, the hero who had faced and overcome a raging elephant was not to be outdone by a horse, and the roan was soon subdued.

Thus equipped with his great iron mace and astride his horse whom he called Rakush, Rustem rode forth with Kai-Kobad at the head of the Persian army to fight against Afrasiyab.

He was a fine figure, tall and broad-shouldered, with straight features, a pale skin and gleaming teeth, while his black hair hung down to his shoulders in silken locks. His dark eyes flashed; indeed the soldiers used to say that Rustem's eyes shot out sparks of fire when the hero was in the midst of battle, and

that they expanded to nearly double their ordinary size, striking the foe with as much terror as did the blows of the great iron mace.

The young hero disdained to wear armour when fighting, but donned coat and full trousers of gorgeous striped silks, on his head a jewelled skull-cap with a gay scarf wound round it as protection against the sun.

Rakush was accoutred in equal splendour, his harness encrusted with gold, and his saddle-cloth of richest embroidery. His master guided him by means of golden shovel-shaped stirrups, leaving the reins over the high pommel of the peaked saddle, which



The two warriors fought for nearly an hour.

was covered with exquisite needlework made by the fair Rudabeh and her maidens.

Rustem was eager to engage Afrasiyab himself in single combat, and in spite of Zal's remonstrances he singled out the huge leader of the Turanian army. Afrasiyab, clad all in black chain armour, riding a great sable charger, and with his banner carried before him, was an alarming figure, but Rustem at once spurred Rakush towards him, waving old Zahon's battle-mace in a threatening manner.

The two warriors fought for nearly an hour, and fortune seemed for a while to smile on Rustem, who as he caught Afrasiyab's belt and lifted the Prince right out of his peaked saddle, felt that his foe was being given into his hand. But alas, the girdle broke, Afrasiyab was rescued by his warriors and the battle was pursued with renewed fierceness by the Persian host, with Rustem always in the lead. Wherever he rode, brandishing his sword, the Turanians were slain in scores. It is indeed said that Rustem slew more than a thousand men that day, and when, towards evening, the enemy fled back to their own country old Zal hailed him with joy as the Champion of the whole world.

Then ensued a period of profound peace for Persia while Kai-Kobad ruled wisely for a hundred years.

## XIII

### The King Who Learned a Trade

THERE was once upon a time a King of Aderbaijan who was a very good king. He ruled wisely and justly and his people prospered. His kingdom was a happy place in which to live, for hardship and oppression were unknown there. Furthermore, the King held in high esteem any of his subjects who possessed any special skill, and never failed to reward any man, however humble in station, who worked hard and honestly. Anyone who excelled in any useful accomplishment was treated with the greatest respect and was assured of a position of dignity.

One day when the King was seated upon his throne in all splendour dispensing justice and listening to whatever petitions his people wished to present to him, two men who had a quarrel came before him to seek his verdict as to who was right and who was wrong. Now one of these men was skilled as a silversmith while the other man had no trade at all. As the arguments were presented it became quite clear to the King and the court officials grouped about him, that the silversmith was in the wrong, and that beyond any shadow of doubt the man without a trade was in the right. Yet the King without any hesitation

decided in favour of the silversmith and ordered that the unskilled man be punished.

Now the King had a counsellor who was a man of great learning and experience. The King, of course, treated anything he had to say with the greatest respect and, when on this occasion the man begged leave to make a request, the King declared himself ready to listen.

"O King," said the wise man, "benign and powerful ruler of this most prosperous of realms, may I pray that of your gracious disposition you will spare this man from punishment? Surely his innocence must shine forth as unmistakably to your Majesty's eyes as it does to mine. Pray disclose to me why your Majesty pardoned the guilty man and condemned the innocent."

The King, however, remained firm in his decision. "I am convinced," he said, "that the silversmith has right on his side. I will explain the matter in privacy."

When the assembly had dispersed and the King and his counsellor were alone, the King spoke thus:

"You are a very astute man, O Vizier, and have guessed rightly that I have some special reason for my seemingly irregular decision. Indeed I once had an experience which greatly impressed me and I thereupon made a vow always to show favour to the man with a trade or profession, even though he be otherwise blameworthy, and to punish the man with no trade or profession even if he should be my own son, my purpose being to encourage my people always to have their children taught some useful occupation according to their station and their abilities. I wished that all my subjects, high and low, if by no other means, through seeing how the skilled were favoured by me and how the unskilled inevitably suffered, should know the value of being master of some craft or branch of learning.

"One day of the years that are past, when my



father was alive and was still the reigning monarch, I was present during an audience. In the course of the conversations the merits of various trades were discussed. Now, while I had received instruction in the arts and sciences befitting a royal prince, this discussion made me want to learn some useful craft. I therefore requested each of the craftsmen of the city to demonstrate his skill before me so that I might decide which craft I should like to learn above



“On the third day a furious storm arose.”

all. I saw the work of each craftsman in turn, and finally decided that of all the work I had seen, that which pleased me most was the work of the mat-maker. I particularly admired the great variety of form and colour that could be introduced into the work. An instructor was accordingly engaged and in due time I became skilful in the craft of mat-making.

“One day I took leave of the king to go on a sailing expedition with a number of companions of my own age. For two days we found pleasure and enjoyment at sea, but on the third day a furious storm arose. Our ship was battered to pieces, my companions were washed overboard and all but two were

drowned. These two survivors and I clung to a raft and drifted about for several days, flung this way and that by the merciless waves, cold, famished and well-nigh choked with fear.

"We prayed fervently to Allah to deliver us from our peril; our prayer was heard and the wind carried us towards land. The three of us went ashore in safety and after some hours' wandering we came to an oasis where delicious fruits and fragrant plants abounded. We made our way through the oasis, resting at night in the trees for fear of wild beasts, and at length reached the city of Baghdad.

"I was wearing several rings of great value and I decided to sell one of the rings in the bazaar and, with the money I obtained, to buy food. Having sold the ring my friends and I entered the shop of a cook, where a great variety of dishes were displayed and where a handsome boy was busying himself. We handed the master of the shop a few coins and requested some food. The master looked at us and said:

"Young men, nobility shines from your faces. It is not fitting that young noblemen like you should eat in the bazaar. There is a handsome room nearby to which persons of quality usually resort. I beg of you, go there and I will have prepared a meal that is worthy of you."

"The boy was sent to show us the way and we soon reached the house. It was a well-appointed residence, the walls being hung with beautiful paintings, and when the boy left us to fetch the food we made to study the paintings to our enjoyment. But no sooner had the boy gone from the house than the floor upon which we were standing began to move and before we could utter a word we were plunged into a well as black as the heart of an infidel.

"Now, the cook from whom we had sought to buy food was an enemy of the Faith and it was his prac-

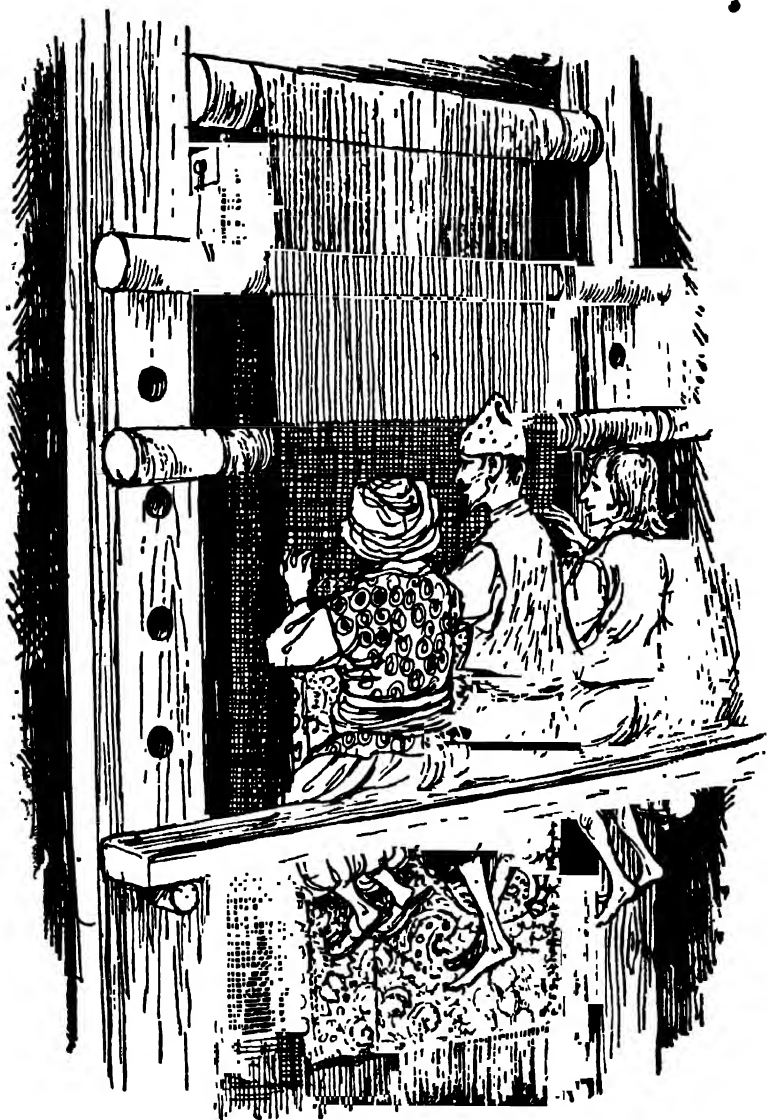
to ensnare Muslims as he had ensnared us and then to kill them, roast their flesh and sell it to other Muslims. We felt near to despair when the same boy who had conducted us to the house descended into the well, sword in hand, intending straightway to kill us. 'It is quite evident,' I thought, 'that these wicked people are hoping to make money out of this.' Aloud I said to the boy: 'Listen, my friend, if you kill us you will gain but little. We are skilled in the craft of mat-making which is a very profitable trade in this city. Come, lay your sword aside, bring to us the tools and materials of the trade, and we will make a mat for you every day.'

"The boy hurried off to inform his master of our proposal. Evidently the cook was impressed by the possibilities of such an arrangement, for the necessary tools and materials arrived forthwith and we were given each day a loaf of barley bread.

"And so we continued to make a mat every day. When we had been working thus for some weeks, an idea occurred to me by which we might obtain our release. In the border of the mat upon which I was engaged I worked a message in Arabic. This was during the reign of Haroun al Raschid, and I thought that if this mat should be offered to the Caliph, our plight might become known. The cook, whose greediness had grown with the sale of the mats, did indeed offer the mat to the Caliph. The Caliph greatly approved of the design and workmanship and took pleasure in examining it closely. He thus discovered the message worked in the border and he asked the cook where the mat came from and whose workmanship it was. The cook replied:

'I have a friend in Basra who sent it to me.'

"The Caliph said. 'Wait here a little and you shall receive a reward that is worthy.' He then called a servant and instructed him to go to our aid. We were forthwith delivered from the well and



"When we had been working thus for some weeks, an idea occurred to me by which we might obtain our release."

conducted to the presence of Haroun.

"At the sight of us the cook began to tremble with fear, and when the Caliph asked him: 'Who are these men?' He said he did not know. Upon receiving this reply the Caliph ordered the instruments of torture to be brought in, whereupon the cook confessed everything. Punishment was meted out to him without mercy.

"Meanwhile the Caliph had been greatly impressed with my skill and ingenuity. He ordered that I should be taken to the bath and presented with rich garments. When I was refreshed and clothed the Caliph asked me about my adventures and I told him the story from beginning to end.

"The Caliph had in the past been obliged to my father for many services and was now more than ready to help me to return to my own country. But first I was pressed to enjoy his hospitality for a few days. When these days of entertainment were at an end I was presented with ten strings of camels and many other rich gifts and was sent on my way with a letter to my father and a guard of fifty men.

"Alas, as I arrived in this city after my long and eventful absence, the first news I heard was of the death of my father. After mourning his passing I assumed all rights and responsibilities as his successor and applied myself diligently to the work of rulership.

"My life had been in jeopardy and a humble trade had saved me. I have ever since had perfect confidence in skilful men. I shall always honour men who have a craft, trade or profession and I shall always despise those who have none."

## XIV

### The Poor Man and the Prophet Khizr

ONCE upon a time there was a King whose reign was beset by trouble and who longed and prayed for a vision of the Prophet Khizr. Now the Prophet Khizr was a wise and saintly man who had drunk of the Water of Life, which meant that he would live on and on to the Day of Judgment. When the people of the land were in trouble they would call upon the Prophet Khizr and he would often appear to them, all dressed in green, to comfort and guide them. The King thought that if only he could see the Prophet Khizr there might be an end to his difficulties. He therefore proclaimed that if any one of his subjects could show him the Prophet Khizr he would reward him with anything for which he cared to ask.

Now, among the King's subjects was a poor man who had fallen badly into debt and could see no way out of it. He grieved for his wife and family and feared that they would have to go hungry. When he heard of the King's offer, he went to the palace and said: "Your Majesty, give me but one thousand tumans and I will show you the Prophet Khizr."

The King gave orders that the man should be paid the money, but made the condition that if after forty

days he had failed in his undertaking he would be executed. The poor man readily agreed to this arrangement and returned home with the money. He paid all his debts, gave his wife what she needed, and then, saying no more, settled down to see what fate would bring.

When the forty days had passed he explained to his wife how he had come by the money which had retrieved their fortunes, and broke the news to her that he was shortly to lose his head. "But," he added, "I am content. My debts are paid, my family are provided for. What does it matter if now I am put to death?" He thereupon took his leave of his sorrowing wife and presented himself at the palace to fulfil his side of the bargain.

"Well," said the King upon seeing the poor man once again, "the forty days have expired. Am I going to see the Prophet Khizr?"

"Your Majesty," said the man. "Could you really have believed that I, a poor, ordinary man, could summon up the Prophet Khizr? I was in debt, my family were destitute, I did not know where to turn. Your thousand tumans have paid my debts and saved my family. I have now come to fulfil my side of the bargain. I know I must be executed."

This was a situation which the King had never before encountered and he was uncertain as to how in justice he should proceed. He therefore called his four viziers to him to take counsel of them. As the viziers grouped themselves around the King an aged man also entered the audience chamber and stood by quietly watching the proceedings.

"Viziers," said the King, "counsel me as to what I should do with this man."

The first vizier stepped forward and said: "If his flesh were cut into strips with a tailor's scissors it would be no more than he deserves."

Then the second vizier spoke up: "I would put him

in a baker's oven and let him cook until there was nothing left of him. That is what I would do with the rascal."

The third vizier added: "I would take a razor and cut him into little pieces. Even that would be too good for him."

But the fourth vizier said: "Your Majesty, the man has played fairly. I would be inclined to set him up with some money and property so that he might start his life anew."

The King listened to them all and then espied the aged man standing in the background. "Come along, old man," he called, "and let me hear too what you have to say."

"What I have to say is this," said the old man, "it is clear that your first vizier was a tailor, for his mind runs to scissors. The second vizier was evidently a baker for he thinks of ovens. As for the third he must surely have been a barber, with his talk of razors. The fourth, however, is not bent on punishment but on helping to rebuild a useful life; he obviously comes from a long line of viziers. The poor man was in despair when he came to you and he was willing to lose his head to save his wife and family. And now, see, he has brought you a vision of Khizr!"

And so saying, the speaker entirely vanished, for it was in truth a vision of the Prophet Khizr that the King had seen.

The King thereupon took the advice of the fourth vizier, who had pleaded for mercy and charity, and bestowed upon the poor man a house and some money with which to set himself up again. As for the other three viziers, he drove them from his counsel and his palace for ever.



## How Rustem Slew the White Demon

KAI-KAUS, the new monarch who succeeded Kai-Kobad as King of Persia, was a vain and foolish man. Indeed, so great was his pride that he imagined himself invincible.

One day a minstrel came to sing before the King, and his song told of the enchanting land of Mazanderan, the country of the Demons.

"It is the abode of spring, O mighty sovereign!" chanted the minstrel, who was in fact a Demon. "We never know the great heat of summer which forces the people of Persia to take refuge in the hills, nor do we have the intense cold of winter when snow lies upon the ground, and you and your people huddle round the iron pots of burning charcoal. Roses and tulips bloom the whole year round, and the bulbul-bird never ceases to pour forth its little soul in ravishing melodies. Believe me, he who has never been to Mazanderan does not know what happiness is."

As he finished his song Kai-Kaus sprang up, and, with a mighty oath, swore that before many moons were past the land of Mazanderan would be his.

His warriors viewed the prospect with dismay, for the Demons were greatly dreaded as foes; but as the

proud and foolish Kai -Kaus considered that he was far greater than King Jemshed or the good Feridun, he would heed the advise of no one. Even old Zal's grave words of warning were ignored, and in a short time the monarch and his army set out on the long journey to Mazanderan, leaving Zal and Rustem to guard Persia during their absence.

Things went well at first. The Persians defeated the army of the King of Mazanderan, and were about to enter his capital in triumph, when the White Demon and his myrmidons emerged from their caves in the Elburz mountains. After this the whole campaign failed disastrously. Pitch darkness enveloped the Persian army, and such huge hailstones fell upon the soldiers that thousands of them were killed. The rest with their monarch were taken captive by the Demons who handed them over to the King of Mazanderan to be thrown into his dungeons.

When the sad news of the overthrow of the Persians reached Zal and Rustem, the latter at once saddled his steed Rakush and started off alone to Mazanderan to free his King. The way he chose was short but full of dangers, and while he slept in a forest on the first night, he was awakened by a great noise and commotion, and starting up he found that the faithful Rakush had been attacked by a huge lion, which, however, he had killed with his hoofs and teeth. Rustem was angry with his beloved horse for having run such a risk by fighting the lion alone, and told him in future to neigh in his ear so as to waken him at the first sign of danger.

During the next three days the Hero and his faithful steed toiled painfully across a trackless desert. The fierce Eastern sun glared down upon them from a cloudless blue sky; there were no trees, no water, and, as the slow hours passed, man and beast were at the point of death from thirst. Kneeling on the burning sand Rustem besought the gods to assist him in the



Dawn was breaking when the monstrous

work of rescuing his King, and, even as he prayed, the dwellers in the high heavens sent him an answer.

A wild sheep trotted by, and the warrior, taking it to be a good omen, followed it. It led him and Rakush to a pool of brackish water in a little grassy oasis. Night was coming on apace, and after the hero had slain and devoured a wild ass, which came to drink at the pool, he wrapped himself up in his long mantle and prepared to go to sleep on the sand, first, however, bidding Rakush awake him if any evil thing should approach.

At midnight a monstrous dragon of appalling aspect crept silently upto the hero. Rakush neighed loudly, the dragon retreated swiftly, and Rustem, springing to his feet, saw nothing. No sooner had the warrior dropped off to sleep than the same thing happened again. Rustem was angry with Rakush for rousing him twice when there was no danger.

Dawn was breaking when the monstrous dragon made its third appearance. The noble horse faithfully woke up his master once more, although he feared his anger but, luckily, this time Rustem perceived his foe, and rushed at it with drawn sword. The conflict was so terrible, that had it not been for the aid given by Rakush, who tore at the dragon's hide with his teeth, and kicked it violently, the hero might have



dragon made its third appearance.

been slain by the fearsome beast. However, the dragon was at last overcome, and Rustem offered up his thanks to the gods before he proceeded on his way.

He had now to cross the Elburz Range by difficult and stony passes. Sometimes Rakush had to clamber up places almost as steep as the sides of a precipice, and Rustem would walk behind holding on to the horse's tail. Here and there Rakush and his master slid down long gravelly slopes, stopping themselves at intervals on the little projections of rocks which jutted out. Once poor Rakush went over the side of an abyss, but his fall was checked by a patch of tamarisk scrub, and he lay there neighing to his master for help. Rustem quickly unwound his long silk waistcloth and managed to slip it round Rakush and then haul his faithful comrade up to firm ground again.

Fortunately there was plenty of food for both man and beast in these mountains, as the ibex and moufflon roamed about in small herds, and fell swiftly to the unerring aim of Rustem's bow, while in the valleys were patches of grass and numerous little streams.

It was a tiring ascent and Rustem was relieved when he was free of the mountains at last, and was able to drop down into the charmingly wooded country of Mazanderan.

That evening the hero found a meal prepared and a flask of wine for him and a mound of barley for Rakush, all laid out on the bank of the stream where he halted for the night, and as he and Rakush were eating and drinking their fill, a beautiful lady approached and sat down close to Rustem. Rustem gallantly handed her a cup of the ruby-coloured wine, but as he did so, the lady turned into a jet-black Demon. Rustem quickly drew his sword and slew it, but the incident served as a warning that he must now be on his guard.

After he and Rakush had struggled through a region where darkness reigned both by day and night, they emerged into a beautiful country, rich with waving corn.

Here he came into conflict with Aulad, the governor of the province, and, having routed his troops and seized their leader, he demanded that Aulad should lead him to where King Kai-Kaus was imprisoned.

Aulad, however, led Rustem to the battlefield just outside the capital where the Persian army had been routed so disastrously. Some hundreds of the Demon warriors were still encamped on the ground, and the hero, having now somewhat rested from the fatigues of his long journey, challenged their general to single combat.

The Demon chieftain was slain, and his fearsome-looking followers fled to the mountains, leaving the city unguarded.

The conqueror at once passed through the great gateway of the town in triumph, Rakush being so pleased with his master's prowess that he neighed incessantly with joy. And the captive King Kai-Kaus and his warriors heard the voice of the mighty war-horse even in their dungeons, and, knowing that Rustem had come to free them, shouted with all their might to guide their deliverer to where they lay, bound in chains. And the inhabitants, fearing Rustem's heavy mace, led the warrior to the underground vaults where King Kai-Kaus and his soldiers had been locked in, and helped him to break down the doors of their prisons.

A great crowd of pale, haggard-looking men rushed out, and surrounded him with cries of joy, but the hero was horrified to perceive that every one of them, from the King downwards, was quite blind. Was this to be the outcome of all his perils and hard fighting? Of what use to Persia would a blind mon-

arch and a blind army be? And he, who had never flinched from any foe, however terrible, wept from sheer despair and sorrow.

Kai-Kaus now spoke, and the hero, listening to his words, took hope again.

"Rustem," he said, "you who are rightly named the Champion of the World, we call upon you for yet another deed of prowess. The great White Demon has deprived us of sight, and the only way in which we can regain it is by bathing our eyes in the blood of the monster. He lies hidden in a great cave on the side of Mount Damavend. Son of mighty Zal, grandson of Zahon the invincible, we call upon you to slay our foe!"

The Persians, upon hearing this, broke forth into shouts, and Rustem, ever ready to fight, and never so happy as when the odds were a hundred to one against him, salaamed to his sovereign, mounted Rakush and galloped off to the mountains. At last he found the entrance to a dark cavern which seemed to lead into the very heart of the awe-inspiring volcano, Damavend.

This was filled with Demons of fearsome aspect, but the hero rushed among them, slaying as he went, until he passed right through the cave and stood on the brink of a seemingly bottomless abyss. When his eyes became accustomed to the gloom, he saw a huge monster below him, covered with white hair and fast asleep. It was the White Demon, and Rustem knew that the fate of Persia was now about to be decided.

"Come forth and meet your doom!" he shouted, clanging his sword upon his brazen shield. And suddenly the great creature stood before him armed with an enormous millstone.

"You must be tired of life," the Demon retorted, "to dare to invade my lair! Tell me your name, so that I may know from whence comes the foolish creature I am about to destroy."

When Rustem spoke of his mighty grandfather, Zahon, the subduer of the Demons, the monster was momentarily terrified, staggering backwards at the dreaded name. But he quickly recovered and without any warning hurled the great millstone at Rustem. The stone fell short of its target and in the next second the White Demon and Rustem were struggling together in mortal combat.

Of that fearful conflict the Persians talk to this day, for such a fight had never raged since the world began. Now the Persian Hero and now the Demon appeared to get the mastery, and both man and monster received many wounds, until it seemed as if both must die.

Just as Rustem was beginning to feel that he must give up the fight from sheer exhaustion a miraculous strength seemed to flow into him. Once more he seized his savage foe in his arms, and this time hurled him with such terrific force on to the stone floor of the cavern that the monster expired, rending the air with his last shrieks.

Rustem offered up fervent thanksgivings, and, collecting in his helmet some of the blood of the White Demon, he made his way back to King Kai-Kaus and his warriors. The released prisoners bathed their eyes in the ghastly fluid and their sight was at once restored.

Before King Kai-Kaus and the soldiers could return to Persia, however, a battle had to be fought against the King of Mazanderan, who was a magician and had the Demon hosts in his sway. For seven days the armies struggled with one another and the issue was still in doubt, but on the eighth day, Rustem decided that he alone would attack the King in person. He felt that if the magician King of Mazanderan were destroyed his followers would have no more heart for fighting and would surrender.

He accordingly singled out the monarch and made



a fierce attack upon him with his drawn sword. Just as he was about to pierce him to the heart, Rustem and all the Persians saw with amazement that the King of Mazanderan was turning into a great mass of rock. Nothing daunted, however, Rustem lifted the enormous boulder, and staggered with it to the tent of King Kai-Kaus. He then addressed it thus:

"If you do not return to your human form at once, O King of Magicians, I will crush you into a thousand pieces and scatter you to the four winds of Heaven." The King of Mazanderan thereupon resumed his human shape, and Rustem bound and led him to Kai-Kaus, who commanded his instant execution.

And then, laden with treasure, the army returned home to Persia in triumph.

## XVI

### Rustem and Sohrab

ONE day when Rustem, the great Champion warrior of Persia, was out on a hunting expedition, he came to the far-off little kingdom of Samengan. While the sun was at its height, he took his usual midday sleep, and during this time his beloved horse Rakush was stolen from him. Rustem searched the country in vain and angrily questioned any peasants he came across, but all to no avail. The faithful Rakush had disappeared without a trace.

Now highly indignant, Rustem decided to make his complaint to the King of the country himself. He was received with great honour and was invited to spend the night in the palace, while men scoured the neighbourhood for the missing steed.

When Rustem was alone in the apartment that had been prepared for him he saw to his astonishment that the curtain at the entrance to the room was being parted, revealing a most lovely maiden who entered, attended by a slave. The great warrior was much taken aback at this vision of beauty and enquired of the lady what she wanted.

"Is there some gallant feat of arms to be done?" he asked. "Do you wish me to free some prisoner

from the power of the Demons?"

"No," she replied, "I want none of those things. I am Tamineh the daughter of the King, and have heard so much of Rustem's mighty deeds that I am resolved either to marry that great hero, or die unwed. I, it is, who stole mighty Rakush, hoping to lure you to the palace." She then fell on her knees and besought Rustem to demand her hand in marriage on the morrow.

The Persian hero who had never contemplated marriage, was, in spite of himself, moved at her extreme beauty and earnestness, and promising to wed her if her father would give his consent to the match sent her away rejoicing. And on the following day the lovely Tamineh became his bride, and there was great gladness throughout the kingdom for many days.

This period of happiness and rejoicing was, however, short-lived, for news soon reached Rustem that the Demons were invading Zabulistan, and he considered it his duty to go at once to the help of Zal, leaving the lovely Tamineh at little more than an hour's notice. As he parted from her he gave her a talisman, telling her that if the gods should grant them a son she should bind it to the child's arm.

Tamineh was very unhappy at first when her husband left her, but rejoiced greatly when her baby was born. He was a strong and beautiful boy, and such a happy child that Tamineh called him Sohrab, the Smiling One. Now Tamineh knew that Rustem was longing for a son to follow in his footsteps and win glory as a hero, and poor Tamineh, having had to part with her warrior husband, wanted to keep the child with her. So she sent word to Rustem that the child who had been born to them was a girl.

Young Sohrab grew up into a fine boy, and great was his pride when his mother told him about the mighty deeds done by his renowned father. Sohrab wanted nothing more than to ride forth, find Rustem

and seek his blessing, and all the tears and entreaties of the Princess Tamineh were in vain. Moreover, the more Sohrab heard of the foolish pride and vanity of King Kai-Kaus, the more convinced was he that Rustem, his father, was more fitted to rule, and it became his dream that he should head an army that would conquer Persia, unseat Kai-Kaus, and place Rustem upon the throne. And such was the young Sohrab's prowess in arms that the men of Samengan gladly hailed him as their leader.

Now Afrasiyab, King of Turan and Persia's deadly enemy, hearing of young Sohrab and his plans, sent an army to help him, for it was the greatest wish of Afrasiyab to overthrow King Kai-Kaus.

Afrasiyab, however, had no intention whatever of handing over Persia to Rustem if the insurgents should succeed in conquering the country, for he wanted to rule over the land himself. He therefore told his generals that they must on no account let Sohrab know which of the Persian warriors was Rustem. It was Afrasiyab's evil design that the two Champions should kill one another in ignorance, and that he himself would then be able to seize the kingdom.

Accordingly, the vast Turanian army set out to invade Persia, and such tales of the valour of the young warrior Sohrab preceded them and reached the ears of King Kai-Kaus, that he at once sent for Rustem, who was now in far Zabulistan, to come at once to the aid of Persia.

In his younger days Rustem had ridden into battle clad in bright silken attire, but now that he was getting old he did not disdain armour, and on this occasion was equipped from head to foot in black mail.

When he arrived at the Persian camp, he was greatly interested in the descriptions of the young warrior Sohrab, and thought sadly that if he and Tamineh had had a son instead of a daughter, he

would be just the age of this valiant youth.

Indeed, when the two armies came in sight of one another, and halted for the night, Rustem, in disguise, made his way into the Turanian camp, and managed to catch a glimpse of young Sohrab as he banqueted in a fine tent with the generals. For a moment, he was astonished at the likeness of the youth to old Zahon, but immediately put such unreasonable thoughts from him and made up his mind to kill his rival as speedily as possible.

Young Sohrab, for his part, was keenly anxious that Rustem's tent should be pointed out to him. The Turanians had captured a Persian soldier, who had been found lingering behind the main body of the army, and Sohrab eagerly questioned this man. He asked him to tell him to which warriors the different pavilions belonged, but when the prisoner observed the special interest his adversary was showing as to the position of Rustem's encampment he feared that Sohrab might seek out the Persian hero and slay him by some subtle means. He therefore told Sohrab that the Champion of the World had not yet arrived from Zabulistan.

On the morrow, the drums beat and the trumpets brayed as a signal that battle was about to begin, and when the Persian and Turanian hosts stood fully armed opposite one another, young Sohrab stepped into the open space between, and loudly challenged King Kai-Kaus to single combat.

Everyone was thrown into a panic at Sohrab's boldness, for it was well known that the Persian monarch, as a consequence of the life of pleasure he led, would be no match for this fine young hero. Moreover, Kai-Kaus, caring only for luxury, had not encouraged his warriors to excel in feats of arms, so they all feared to go forth against the youthful Champion.

Therefore, everyone cried out that Persia was lost

unless Rustem would come to the rescue. The sound of these cries reached Rustem as he lay resting in his tent, which, embellished with a great device resembling the Simurgh or Wonder-bird, had been pitched at the rear of the Persian army.

"Rustem! Rustem!" he heard voices calling, "Champion of the World, come forth to the rescue of Persia!"

And as he emerged from the pavilion, wondering at the excited cries, he was surrounded by an eager throng begging him to hasten and save the honour of Persia, as Sohrab was taunting the King with cowardice.

The hero had not intended to fight so soon, but when he understood that there was not a single warrior who dared to face the youthful Sohrab, he quickly donned his black suit of mail.

"Only let it not be known," he declared as he went forth, followed by Rakush, "that Persia was so ill-served that Rustem himself had to be called upon to fight a beardless youth."

When he stood face to face with his boyish opponent however, he was touched with pity at his extreme youth, and urged him to give up the combat.

"I will yield at once if you are Rustem", young Sohrab replied. "Tell me, I beg you, are you Rustem?"

"Do you really think that Rustem would stoop to fight with such a boy as you?" the Champion replied. "I am but the servant of that mighty hero."

When the youth heard this taunt, he rushed towards Rustem, and the fight began.

So fierce was the encounter that their spears were broken, their swords snapped, their chain armour torn, and they themselves bled from many grievous wounds. But neither would give way, and after a while they threw aside their shattered clubs and their bows, having shot away all their arrows, and began to wrestle together. But neither could get the smallest

advantage, and as night was fast approaching, they agreed to postpone the combat until the next day, both heroes being weary from their twelve hours' struggle.

Rustem thought of the morrow with deep foreboding, feeling that his youthful foe was superior to him as a warrior.

Meanwhile Sohrab sought out his aged counsellor who knew his secret and had known his father.

"Did you see the Champion with whom I fought today?" he asked eagerly. "Was he not like your description of Rustem, my father?"

But the old man's eyesight was failing and he replied: "I have seen no one like Rustem today."

Sohrab then implored the Turanian generals to tell him whether his enemy were Rustem or not, as if he were that Champion he would be fighting against his father. But the generals obeyed the commands of Afrasiyab and insisted that the Persian warrior was not Rustem at all.

Therefore, as soon as day broke, the two Champions met face to face once more, but Sohrab felt such an overwhelming affection for his adversary that he begged him to be his friend and talk with him in peace.

This, however, Rustem declined to do, and the two began to wrestle mightily, and after a while the youth hurled his foe down upon the desert sand. He was about to despatch him when Rustem called out:

"It is against the custom of Persia to kill an enemy until he has been thrown to the ground twice!"

Sohrab at once stayed his hand, moved by a strange love for his opponent. As it was now the hour of sunset the combatants decided to finish their fight on the morrow, and retired to their different camps for the night.

Rustem passed many hours in fervent prayer to the gods that night, imploring their help, for he knew

that the Turanian Champion was stronger and more active than he was. Age was slowly taking from the hero his once boundless strength, and little by little was stiffening his limbs, so marvellously supple in former years. He understood all too well that the renewal of the combat would almost certainly mean the end of his life.

When the two heroes stood face to face again in the early morning, a new strength seemed to flow into Rustem. With a blood-curdling battle-cry he fell upon Sohrab, and the combatants swayed this way and that, interlocked in a deadly embrace. Now one seemed to get the advantage and now the other, and the two armies watched this wrestling match with bated breath, knowing that on its result hung the fate of two kingdoms.

At last Rustem noted that his enemy's grasp was getting weaker, so, putting forth all his strength in one stupendous effort, he hurled Sohrab to the ground, and at once drove his dagger into his side.

A cry of terror and indignation rose from the Turanians, while the Persians shouted and yelled with joy, but Rustem noticed none of these things. He was suddenly overcome with shame for his unchivalrous deed, for he should have thrown his adversary to the ground a second time, according to the rule he had himself invoked the previous day. And then he heard the dying youth murmur:

"My mighty father, Rustem, will avenge my death. Rustem is the soul of honour."

And Rustem, dazed and bewildered, murmured: "If Rustem had had a son he would have wished him to be a boy like you."

With these words Rustem fell fainting to the ground.

When after a while, his senses returned to him, Rustem told Sohrab who he was and asked him if he had any token to prove that he was the son of Rustem.



• The young hero, faintly murmuring that he had felt a strange love for his adversary from the moment he first saw him, besought him to strip off his coat of mail. This Rustem did, and disclosed the amulet which he long ago had given to Princess Tamineh of Samengan.

And when Rustem knew by that token that his own child lay before him, and that he himself had killed him, he exclaimed :

“I can live no longer ! My sword shall end my miserable life.”

But this Sohrab would not permit. “Destiny,” he said, “has ordained that my life should end thus. But you, O father, must live to be the Shield of Persia.”

When the armies saw their Champions lying prone on the desert sand, they believed that both were dead, and a bitter wail of woe arose into the still air, mingled with the sad neighs of Rakush.

After a while some of the Persian warriors galloped to the scene of the fight, and found Rustem supporting Sohrab’s head and weeping terribly. The boy was trying to console his father, but was himself filled with sadness at the thought of how short his life had been.

His last words, however, were for others.

“Father,” he gasped, slowly and painfully, “let the Turanian army depart in peace and unmolested. It was owing to my burning desire to seat you upon the throne of Persia and not to the wish of Afrasiyab that it came hither. Mine, and mine alone, was the fault.”

And when Rustem had given his promise, the youth drew the dagger from his side; his blood ebbed away and he breathed his last.

There was no further thought of fighting. The two camps broke up, and everyone returned to his own home, while Rustem, after burning his armour and weapons, carried his son back to far Zabulistan to be buried with great pomp and lamentation.

And when the sad news arrived at Samengan poor Tamineh was nearly mad with grief, feeling that her son owed his death to her deceit. Day and night she wept for her beloved child, until at last the gods in mercy took her to rejoin him whom she had so fondly loved.

## XVII

### The End of Afrasiyab

AFRASIYAB, King of Turan, and enemy of Persia, was constantly plotting how he could rid the world of Rustem, the Persian hero, and one day, as he was deep in his evil thoughts, a beautiful woman was brought before him. She asked to be permitted to speak with him quite alone.

She then told him that she was a sorceress, and was confident that her witchcraft would soon bring Rustem into the King's power, as no living man could resist her charms. Afrasiyab consented to the plan she proposed, gave her plenty of money, and sent her off to Zabulistan in company with Pilsam, his bravest warrior. The witch, pretending to be the wife of a rich merchant, bought a large house and fortress close to Rustem's palace, and offered food and wine to all who passed by her dwelling.

It was not long before the day came when three of Persia's bravest warriors entered her hall. Her beauty was so great that these heroes gazed at her with rapture and joyously drank enchanted wine from the golden goblets which she handed them. Thereupon they all sank helpless at her feet, and Pilsam bound them with stout rope and locked them up in the

fortress.

Not long after this, the aged Zal, father of Rustem, also passed this way, and being curious to know who this lady might be, he accepted her pressing offer of hospitality and entered her house.

But the spells of the fair sorceress had no effect upon him, because the image of fair Rudabeh, his wife, now in her grave, was seldom absent from his mind. He had loved his wife so well that he never cared to look upon the face of any other woman, and therefore the enchanted wine did him no harm.

After a while, therefore, he thanked the lady for her kindness and made to leave her house. At the gate, however, he was stopped by a water-carrier, who, finding the skin he bore filled with water, very heavy, was resting in the shade.

"Deliverer of the poor," the man began, "may I, unworthy son of a dog, speak to Your Highness?" And when Zal bade him tell what was in his mind, he said that he had noticed that the beautiful lady had lured three warriors into her dwelling, and that they had not come out again. This aroused Zal's suspicions, for he had not seen the warriors in the house; he had, however, noted how a narrow flight of stone steps led up to the fortress, and had been surprised to see a couple of Persian helmets lying near by.

He rushed back to challenge the lady, but when she perceived him on her threshold, she fled up the staircase and so into the tower, slamming the door behind her. Zal pursued her hotly, and proceeded to break down the door. When his mighty blows had gained him entry to the tower, he found Pilsam inside and entered into a terrific combat with him. Meanwhile, seeing that things were going badly with Zal, the water-carrier had summoned Rustem to come to the help of his aged father. The Persian hero promptly killed Pilsam and released the three

prisoners. While all this was going on, the sorceress, who was the cause of all the mischief, slipped away. She did not dare to return to Afrasiyab to tell him that her plan to bring about the downfall of Rustem had come to nought, so she went off to live in one of the great cities of India, taking with her all the money Afrasiyab had given her.

When Afrasiyab heard that Pilsam, his mightiest warrior, had been killed by Rustem, and that his plan to entrap the latter had been foiled, he flew into a terrible rage. Indeed, so angry was he that he was quite beside himself. He refused to eat or drink, and he flung his beautifully jewelled water-pipes at the ornaments in his hall. His servants feared to approach him lest he should order their instant execution.

After three awful days, during which no one in the palace felt that his head was safe on his shoulders, Afrasiyab became a little calmer, and summoned his doctors and magicians to a council. When they were all standing in their long robes and white turbans with bent heads before his throne, he addressed them thus:

"Learned men, who for long years have been nourished by my gracious bounty, now is the time to show your gratitude to your monarch. All of you know that I have a deadly enemy. All of you know that this kingdom of Turan is never safe from invasion while Rustem lives. I have summoned you here in order that you may, after consulting the course of the planets, predict the death of the Champion of the World. You must inform me whether I, the King, or whether Rustem, my enemy, will depart first from this world, and you must also tell me in what manner it is ordained that we shall each make our exit from this life." Here Afrasiyab paused for a moment, and then, waving them away haughtily, he cried: "Begone now to your studies and return at this time three days hence to tell me the result!"

The learned men were by no means happy during the interval allotted to them, for read the stars as they might, they always foresaw the same thing, which was that Afrasiyab would shortly be fleeing for his life and would meet a violent death. When they turned to the horoscope of Rustem they found that a long span of life and much honour and riches awaited that hero, though his latter days were clouded with sorrow and ended in blood.

On the morning of the third day, the trembling magicians met in secret as the dawn broke, and nervously whispered together. Their lives hung in the balance, for they well knew that, if they told Afrasiyab the truth, in all probability not a man among them would see another sunrise.

At last he who was the boldest among them spoke out. "Brothers," he began, "it is written in the stars that our royal master is to die. Nothing we can do or say will save him, for who can set aside the decrees of Destiny? Let us, therefore, conceal the truth, for it is certain that our lives will be sacrificed, and that speedily, if we do not do so. Shall we not all agree that Rustem is to die by the sword before another moon has waned, but that our monarch is to be the light of his faithful subjects for uncounted years?"

The speaker had but put into words what each man felt in his heart, and he was answered by a murmur of agreement.

Afrasiyab was naturally much pleased at the predictions of the magicians when they came into his presence. He was particularly curious to know the exact manner of the supposed death of Rustem, and was not satisfied until the learned man, who had counselled the others to deceive, declared that he had had a vision of the Champion of the World dying of wounds in the midst of battle.

This decided the Turanian monarch to invade Persia yet once again. But this time his army was

utterly routed by Rustem and he himself was captured. He was led in chains to King Kai-Khosrau, who at once put him to death.

## XVIII

### The Independent Man

MANY hundreds of years ago there were two men of Kabul who fell upon very hard times. They lost all they owned and suffered great hardship and poverty. So great was their misfortune that, try as they might, they could not improve their position. Always something happened to cause them a setback. Great were the bodily hunger and distress of mind which they suffered. Grief and sorrow lay upon them like a heavy cloud.

One day one man said to the other: "We have suffered much and have toiled hard, yet there seems to be no hope of improving our lot. Let us leave this country and seek our fortune elsewhere. Surely that would be a wise move. The good Sultan Mahmud is now reigning, and he is well known for his generosity. Let us go to Ghazni and try to see him. Then at least it will give us some hope that our miserable circumstances may be altered."

So they set out for Ghazni and on the road they met a man who joined their company and walked with them. He was a very pious man and he seemed happy and contented; indeed, it was as if he walked the earth like one of the blessed.



“Tell me, my brothers,” he asked the two men, “where are you going? And what is the purpose of your journey?”

“We have both suffered great and prolonged misfortune and have endured great hardship,” the two men replied. “In Kabul we have toiled hard and long and have yet failed to improve our lot, and having heard of the great generosity of Sultan Mahmud and his concern for the poor and needy we have decided to make our way to him in the hope that he will look kindly upon us and help us back on to the road of prosperity.”

The two men of Kabul then asked the stranger whither he was bound and what the object of his journey was.

“I, too, have nothing I can call my own in my country, and my affairs, too, are going badly,” he replied. “I go in search of some lawful means of support, but I do not expect anything from the Sultan Mahmud or anyone like him. Sultan Mahmud and his kind are besieged by a hundred thousand men all hoping that he of his infinite grace and bounty will bestow some gift or favour upon them. I shall look elsewhere for a solution to my difficulties.”

The three men pursued their journey in company, and when they at length arrived in Ghazni they took up their lodging together in a ruined building.

One night the three men were sitting together in the ruin talking of this and that, and it so happened that at this time the Sultan Mahmud had left his palace with two close friends to take a walk in the moonlight. As they approached the ruin the Sultan was attracted by the sound of voices; he walked on, discovered the three travellers, and asked them who they were.

The two men of Kabul replied: “We have been crushed in the press of poverty and misfortune and are now distressed and helpless. We left our own



The three men at length arrived in Ghazni.

country to seek some betterment of our lot elsewhere. Fate has led us hither and we hope that somehow, somewhere, the cloud of misery which envelops us will be lifted."

"And what are your wishes?" enquired the Sultan.

"Even if we say what our wishes are we know they will never be fulfilled," said the two men of Kabul. "What useful purpose will be served by reciting them?"

And the Sultan said: "It is the duty of men to help each other. Therefore, tell me your desires that I at least may know how you could be helped."

The first man replied: "I was once prosperous and had great wealth. This world, with its chances and changes, ceased to be lucky for me, and the shame of my poverty and the disgrace of my family have caused me to leave my country. Now, if I had ten thousand dinars I could regard the sum as fresh capital and could then raise my head again and return to my country."

The second man replied: "I had a dutiful and loving wife. The loveliness of her features surpassed the rose in beauty; the radiance of her face made the moon seem to decline in splendour. I loved her much and could not bear to be parted from her. But she died and I was so consumed with grief that I felt lost and helpless. If His Highness the Sultan were to present me with a member of his harem so that my life might once more be lighted by the sun of her presence, I would gladly return to my own country."

The third man remaining silent, the Sultan turned to him and said: "And have you no wish?" And the third man answered:

"I place all my trust in God. I need neither a wife nor gold. I turn my face towards the mercy of God by whom all favours are granted. All our desires are known to God and God knows what we deserve. I place myself in His hands; He will grant whatever is

right for me. All I ask of you, sir, is this: if you enjoy the favour of God and if He grants you your desires, please pray to Him for my sake that I may never follow a line of thought or action which is against His will. ”

The Sultan said no more and, without letting it be known who he was, rose and departed. Next morning he ordered that the three strangers whom he had met in the ruin be brought to his presence.

When the men saw the Sultan and realized that he was the man with whom they had spoken on the previous evening, they thought at first that he was going to be angry with them. But the Sultan asked each to step forward in turn and state his wants, and the two men of Kabul repeated what they had said before. When it was the turn of the third man to step forward and speak he said :

“ Begging leaves a bitter taste in the mouth. Sweet is the generosity of the noble-minded. O most kind of rulers, may the treasury of your desires remain filled with the gold, silver and jewels of prosperity so long as the storehouse of God is full of blessings. Although many rejoice in your bounty and you yourself know the sweet taste of good deeds, those who have found their peace with God are so contented that they have no desire to take anything from another man. Contentment is not sweetened by the generosity of others and the delights of independence are far greater than any pleasure there may be in receiving gifts from others. I submit my hopes and longings only to God; he will grant what is right and good for me. I have no need to ask another man for anything. ”

Now the Sultan, who was not used to meeting such independence, tried to persuade the man to ask for some gift or favour, but the man could not be shaken from his avowed principles. The Sultan then gave orders that the man who wanted a wife should be

given one of the Sultan's own damsels, while the man who wanted money was presented with two purses of gold. He then commanded that all three men should return to their own countries.

The three men accordingly set out on the road back to Kabul.

When the companions had walked about seven miles the man who had been given the gold began to feel tired from the weight of it so he handed it to his empty-handed friend, requesting him to carry it until he had rested a while.

After the three men had left the presence of the Sultan, the ruler turned to his courtiers and said: "That independent man has put me greatly to shame. Although I tried to persuade him to accept a gift of some kind he would take nothing and when he left me I felt as if I were in the position of a poor man."

Now, one of the courtiers was a very greedy man, and greedy men are the natural enemies of the contented. "The sultans and kings of this world," said the greedy courtier, "are God's treasurers. Men who will not turn to their rulers for help or scorn their favours are guilty of the sin of pride and act contrary to the will of God. Such men deserve to die and should be punished."

This statement greatly excited the Sultan and he at once ordered one of his chamberlains to hasten along the road which the three men had taken and, leaving undisturbed the man with the gold and the man with the girl, to seize the man who was empty-handed, kill him and bring his head back to the Sultan.

However, it so happened that when the chamberlain overtook the three men, the independent man was carrying the gold upon his back and the owner of the gold was empty-handed. The chamberlain acted swiftly and without wasting words. He cut off the head of the owner of the gold and returned with it to the Sultan.

When the Sultan saw the head he exclaimed: "Thoughtless fellow, you have made a mistake!" and immediately sent off another chamberlain, commanding him to sever the head of the man who carried no burden. But it so happened that the owner of the girl had entrusted her to the independent man and had fallen a little behind. When the messenger came up he perceived the owner of the girl following empty-handed in the wake of the independent man, and immediately cut off his head. He hurried back to the palace and presented the head to his master, but again the Sultan cried in astonishment: "This man has also been killed by mistake!"

The Sultan was thrown into great agitation, but when he had had time to think he became calm and saw that the grace of God had indeed sheltered the independent man from harm. He thereupon summoned another attendant and commanded him to follow the same road and bring into his presence the man who was walking along with both the gold and the girl.

When this was done and the independent man was once more standing before the Sultan, the ruler said: "And what has become of your companions?"

"May the Sultan prosper and live forever!" answered the independent man. "He who presented my companions with the gold and the damsel has in return taken their lives. Any man who puts possessions before his Creator turns his face away from real happiness and will not pluck a single flower from the garden of his desires. Whoever turns away from God will find no happiness wherever else he turns."

These remarks greatly impressed the Sultan and made him realise that this man had indeed tasted the sweets of the love and knowledge of God. He said to him:

"O wonderful example of obedience to the laws of God, I am most anxious to bestow something on you.

Please accept some gift from me so that I may be always indebted to you. I beg of you, by God, ask something of me."

And the independent man replied: "I have two wishes: first, that you send a large sum of money to Kabul to help the families of the two men who, through no fault of their own, have been murdered; and secondly, that I may be allowed to enjoy the lease of a small dwelling in which I may carry on the trade of a weaver and earn an honest living."

The Sultan agreed readily and then in his turn made three requests of the independent man. "If," he said, "you bear any ill-feeling towards me, I beg you to forget it. That is my first request. My second is that you pray to God that I may be forgiven for the death of those two innocent men. My third request is that you shall come to me every Friday evening so that I may have the pleasure of talking with you."

To all of this the independent man agreed. He then set about his trade as a weaver and worked so hard that he became rich and prosperous. And he used his wealth to do good works among men who were poor or in distress.

## XIX

### Byzun and Manijeh

IN THE kingdom of Persia at the Court of King Kai-Khosrau was a tried old warrior named Girgin. He had always been well regarded and favoured by his King, but as the years passed he became prey to jealous fears about the young heroes who would one day supplant him. He was particularly jealous of a young noble named Byzun, who was a kinsman of the great Rustem and showed promise of similar prowess.

Byzun was always anxious to seize any opportunity to prove himself, and when news reached the Persian Court that the land of Aman was being overrun by herds of wild boar Byzun at once begged to be allowed to go to the help of the unfortunate Amanians. Girgin regarded the youth as arrogant and presumptuous, but when the King commanded that he should accompany Byzun on this adventure, he could do nought but agree.

When Byzun and Girgin had accomplished their mission and were still far from home, Girgin began to plot how he could rid himself of Byzun, and one evening while they were resting in their tent, Girgin asked Byzun if he had ever heard of Manijeh, the daughter of Afrasiyab, King of Turan.



"The poets of Turan hail her as the most beautiful woman in existence," he said; "tall as a cypress, with skin white as ivory and eyes glowing like the narcissus, she captivates all hearts, and he who has never seen her does not know what the word loveliness really means."

Byzun set down the silver cup which he was raising to his lips, and enquired of Girgin whether it would be possible to get a glimpse of this wonderful creature.

"Nothing is easier," the wily old warrior answered. "Here as you know we are almost on the frontier of Turan, and the peasants tell me that it is Manijeh's custom to spend the spring months in a fair garden very few leagues from this place. Let us ride there tomorrow, bribe the servants to allow us to have a glimpse of her surpassing beauty, and then make our way back to Persia."

This Girgin said, hoping to lure Byzun to destruction, for he knew only too well that King Afrasiyab would kill any Persian who dared to approach his daughter.

On the morrow, therefore, they rose early, and rode off towards Turan, bidding their servants load the mules and wait for them at a certain stage on the road to Persia.

Before many hours were past, they reached the camp of the Princess, pitched in a grove of huge walnut trees, and noticing one tent larger than any of the others, and made of scarlet cloth embroidered with peacocks, they boldly advanced towards it. This was, of course, the pavilion of Manijeh, and as the two Persians passed the entrance they saw a most beautiful woman reclining on a pile of silk carpets. She glanced at them enquiringly, and Byzun, bowing low from his saddle, gazed into her wondrous eyes with a look of adoration, and rode on slowly with Girgin.

Now the young Persian noble was the handsomest

man at the court of King Kai-Khosrau, and it is not surprising therefore that the fair Manijeh was immediately intrigued. She accordingly summoned her nurse, and told her to follow the stranger and enquire who he was. Byzun, for his part, had been completely captivated by sight of Manijeh, and when the old nurse overtook him he received her warmly, answered all her questions and requested that he might be allowed to speak to the beauteous Manijeh.

Byzun and Manijeh met that same day and instantly fell in love.

The Princess, knowing well enough that if Afrasiyab were to discover that his daughter loved one of the hated Persians he would at once separate them and might even kill her lover, urged that they should be married in secret forthwith. The old nurse at once summoned a priest to perform the ceremony.

Girgin rejoiced greatly at the thought that Byzun had walked straight into the trap and that the young warrior in all probability would never see Persia again.

When Byzun had told him of the marriage, therefore, he made his farewells and went on his way well pleased. Meanwhile the honeymoon passed in great happiness in the grove of walnut trees.

At last, however, the day arrived when it was necessary for the Princess and her retinue to return to the Court of Turan. Byzun, who saw clearly that if he went with her he would be walking into the very jaws of danger, begged his wife to let him go back to Persia and try to arrange matters with King Afrasiyab from there.

But Manijeh could not bring herself to part from her husband, and that evening during dinner she offered him a draught of wine from her own goblet.

"Drink to our happiness, light of my soul!" she exclaimed. "May our love endure strong as now until the grave closes over us. May we have one life and one death!" And she gave him a long look

of deep affection as he drained the cup to the dregs.

But the wine was drugged, and almost immediately Byzun became very drowsy and fell into a deep sleep. He slept hour after hour, while the tents were struck, and the caravan journeyed through the summer night to the city of Turan.

Byzun awoke next day to find himself in the Princess's apartments of the palace. Bewildered and angry, he reproached Manijeh for her treachery. But she bore all his hard words so patiently, and looked so beautiful as she knelt weeping at his feet, that he had to forgive her.

"I could not let you return to Persia," she said between sobs. "You might have forgotten me, your wife, and have never come back. If you forsake me I shall die! I cannot live without you!"

Indeed, Byzun had good cause for his anger, for as soon as Afrasiyab learned that his beautiful daughter had married a Persian youth, he sent his soldiers to seize him. The young warrior was led, bound with chains, into the presence of the King Afrasiyab was in a towering rage.

"Son of a dog," he shouted, "you whose ancestors have been jackals from remote ages, how dared you raise your eyes to the fairest flower of my kingdom? Do you not know that I slay without mercy any of the accursed land of Persia who venture here without good reason, and how much more *you* who have thus presumed to insult me? Prepare, therefore, to die before an hour be past."

The fear of death did not make Byzun quail before the anger of the King of Turan. He drew himself up to his full height, and, looking boldly into the face of the monarch, he declared :

"Kill me if you will, but remember that I am a kinsman of mighty Rustem, who will not fail to avenge my death."

At these words Afrasiyab became even more furi-

ous, for he regarded Rustem as his deadliest enemy. He summoned the executioners, who were standing by, and commanded them to hang Byzun without delay from a great tree that grew just outside the palace. And this sentence would have been carried out if one of the wisest of the King's councillors had not intervened at the very last moment and pleaded urgently with Afrasiyab for the life of his captive.

"O mighty monarch," he said, "your kingdom is now at peace, and all your subjects enjoy prosperity. If in your righteous anger, you take the life of this kinsman of great Rustem, you will bring war on Turan. The Persians will immediately despatch a large army to avenge young Byzun's death, and remember, O King, that among all the warriors of Turan there is none to compare with the Champion of the World."

Afrasiyab resolved thereupon to imprison Byzun, and torture him instead. He gave orders that the captive should be chained, head downwards, in a deep pit, so that he might never see the sun or the moon again, and the Demons were ordered to place an enormous mass of rock over the mouth of the chasm. He also commanded that Manijeh should share the punishment of her husband, but her maidens implored the King so piteously to have mercy on their beautiful mistress, that he finally decided that she should be stripped of all her jewels and left beside the horrible pit. And so Manijeh remained, comforting her husband as best she could with loving words, promising that she would never forsake him as long as life lasted. Fortunately there was a hole in the stone through which Manijeh could pass food down to Byzun, and so keep him alive.

Girgin meanwhile had returned to Persia, but he feared to tell the truth, lest the King should say that he ought to have prevented the young warrior from such a dangerous adventure. He reported therefore

that on the journey home a terrific storm had arisen and that when the heavens had cleared Byzun was nowhere to be found. Girgin went on to relate that he and the servants had searched for many hours, and only came across the young noble's horse, which was galloping about wildly and neighing in a very frenzy of terror.

Now Girgin had quite forgotten that King Kai-Khosrau possessed a magic cup, in which he could see everything and everybody in the whole world. This wondrous goblet had formerly been the property of King Jemshed, and had been made for him by the Demons. Upon hearing Girgin's story, the monarch sent for his magicians and commanded them to make suitable incantations, while he gazed into the enchanted bowl. In a flash Kai-Khosrau saw poor Byzun, bound



King Kai-Khosrau possessed a magic cup.

with chains, in the horrible pit, and unhappy Manijeh weeping beside the Demon-stone.

The whole Persian court rejoiced to know that the brave young noble was still alive. Meanwhile the King commanded that Girgin should be imprisoned in a deep dungeon, there to stay until Byzun was free once more.

The King then commanded Rustem to come to the rescue. The Champion told Kai-Khosrau that he did not need an army, but would go in disguise with a thousand warriors, all of them pretending to be merchants and camel-drivers.

A great troop of camels therefore was laden with jewels, silks, embroideries and carpets, and set out for the kingdom of Afrasiyab.

The caravan made a great stir when it reached the city of Turan as such rich merchandise had never been seen there before, and all the inhabitants were very eager to buy.

When Manijeh heard of its arrival, she became greatly excited, and approaching the man whom she took to be the chief merchant (it was in fact Rustem), she asked him whether King Kai-Khosrau knew that one of his bravest warriors was cruelly imprisoned in Turan. Rustem did not want to disclose his plans too soon, so he tried to put the Princess off with a rough answer.

"What do I, a mere merchant, know about the Persian Court?" he asked. "I have never even heard the name of Byzun, so how can his fate matter to me?"

Whereupon Manijeh wept so bitterly that Rustem's heart was softened, and he said to her, kindly:

"Poor maiden, I perceive that you are in some great trouble. Perchance I may be able to help you, though I am neither a warrior nor a courtier."

The unhappy Princess clutched at the sympathy in her misery and desolation, and poured out her story while the tears ran down her cheeks. Rustem listened

attentively, and gave Manijeh a roast fowl to take to the prisoner. In the body of the bird Rustem had concealed his own signet-ring with his name engraved upon it.

When Byzun came across the ring he gave an exclamation of joy.

"Beloved, what is it? Why do you smile?" enquired the Princess, as she peered at him through the hole in the stone.

"Let us rejoice!" replied Byzun. "It was Rustem with whom you spoke. He has come to release me. Go to him in haste and ask what he plans to do."

The princess, now filled with hope, hurried to the Champion of the World, who told her to light a fire beside the pit as soon as it was dark, in order to guide him and his soldiers to the spot. She, on her side, bade him beware of the Demon-guards, and, above all, of their leader, who cherished a terrible hatred against Rustem, the slayer of his father, the White Demon.

Then Manijeh returned to her husband, and collected a big heap of camel-thorn for the bonfire. As soon as darkness fell the fire was lit. Manijeh remained beside it in fear and trembling, constantly feeding it, for camel-thorn blazes up fiercely and goes out quickly. And then at last the tramp of Rustem and his warriors could be heard coming nearer and nearer.

The fight that ensued between the Persians and the Demons was so fierce that at times it almost seemed as if Byzun might never be released. In the midst of all the tumult, a terrific roar was suddenly heard, and the leader of the Demons, a monster most hideous to look upon, sprang to the front and rushed at the Champion of the World.

"Murderer of my father, your last hour has come!" it yelled, and, armed with a great tree torn up by the roots, it challenged Rustem to single combat. Manijeh implored the gods for help. Meanwhile the Demon



Armed with a great tree torn up by the roots the monster rushed at Rustem.



vanished again and again, just when the Champion seemed about to get the better of it.

At last, however, the rage of the Demon grew to such a pitch that it forgot all caution and made a headlong dash at Rustem with the tree trunk. The old hero leapt nimbly aside to avoid the charge, and plunged his sword deep into the side of the monster as it passed.

The victory was to the Persians.

They pursued the vanquished Demons for some miles, and then Rustem managed, by a great effort, to push away the Demon-stone from the mouth of the pit and to haul up poor Byzun by means of his lasso.

The whole release had been done so secretly that King Afrasiyab had no idea of what was going on during the night. He was therefore much alarmed when he heard a voice, loud as thunder, shouting through the palace:

"Awake, O sovereign! Byzun is free, and Rustem is here to avenge him!"

The Persians had slain all the guards, and were swarming into every room, killing all who resisted them, and gathering up jewels and gold as they passed. Afrasiyab, without losing a moment, fled through a secret passage which led from his chamber to the barracks of his soldiers, and hastily summoned his army. The two forces met at daybreak.

The Persians numbered only a thousand, but, with Rustem at their head, it was as if they were a host tenfold that strength, and the Champion of the World<sup>t</sup> never distinguished himself more than on that day.

The Turanians were utterly routed, and their conquerors returned to Persia laden with spoil.

Byzun and Manijeh were received with great honour at the Court of King Kai-Khosrau, who felt that he could hardly do enough to make up to them for all their suffering. And it is related that they lived happily together ever after.

## The Kazi and the Merchant's Wife

LONG ago, during the reign of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni, a man was travelling from Aberbaijan to Hindustan. When he arrived at Ghazni he found the climate so much to his liking that he decided to settle there. He was experienced in business and he set himself up in the bazaar as a broker. He became very successful and his business prospered. He decided to marry and was fortunate enough to find a young woman, who was both good and beautiful, to become his wife.

As time passed, his business flourished more and more until he became known as one of the richest of the merchants. He decided that he should extend his business to Hindustan and he accordingly sent goods to that country. Before long it became desirable that he should travel there himself to attend personally to certain matters, but he was greatly troubled because he had no relations or close friends to whom he could entrust his wife until his return. He therefore decided to postpone his journey until he had made some suitable arrangements for his wife in his absence.

Now the Kazi, or magistrate, of the city was well

known for his piety, goodness and honour and the merchant considered it would be an excellent thing if his wife could stay in the house of this godly and esteemed man until he returned from his journey. The merchant therefore made his way to the house of the Kazi and, bowing deeply to the honoured man, he said:

“O pillar of truth and piety, from whose great intellect words of wisdom flow for the benefit of those who seek to walk in the paths of goodness! I, your humble servant, an inhabitant of this city, desire to undertake a journey to Hindustan. I have a young wife, a woman of natural excellence, modesty and virtue, and I have no one in whose care I can leave her. I therefore venture to turn to your lordship in the hope that she may find refuge with you.”

The Kazi readily agreed and said that he would take care of the merchant's wife, whereupon the merchant, having given his wife sufficient money to meet a year's expenses, delivered her to the Kazi and set out on his journey.

The lady passed all her time in the house of the Kazi in prayer and devotion and practically a whole year had elapsed without untoward incident, when one day the Kazi himself seeing her goodness and her beauty felt suddenly covetous and wished she belonged to him instead of to the merchant. He became angry with jealousy. A few days later when his own wife had gone out and had left the merchant's wife to take care of the house in her absence, all the Kazi's goodness was momentarily overpowered by the temptation to do evil, and his clever brain bent itself to devising some cunning way to do the lady harm. He accordingly entered the lady's room and, locking the door behind him, he said :

“Virtuous lady, you must know that my reputation for piety and honesty is famed the world over. Nothing would tempt me away from the paths of righteousness. Why, then, do you try to avoid me? You

have nothing to fear from me, so stern is my obedience to the laws of God and so great my fear of eternal punishment should I do wrong. I would do nothing to harm you, so please do not be afraid of me."

Then, when the merchant's wife seemed somewhat reassured, he continued: "I know it is against the law of God and the Prophet to ask favours of guests, but you now belong to this house and I am dependent on your kindness. Indeed I am hungry and I would request you to bring me some food."

The merchant's wife went shyly to fetch some food. She placed it before the Kazi and then retired modestly into a corner. Now the Kazi had managed to get hold of a certain drug, and it was his plan to get the merchant's wife to swallow the drug which would render her unconscious. So he said to the lady:

"Dear lady, must I eat alone? He who eats alone, you know, has Satan for a companion. Come now, free me from the snares of the Devil by taking this meal with me."

So winning was his way that at length the lady moved nearer to the table, where she sat down and helped herself to some food, into which the Kazi, unobserved, threw some of the drug. After she had eaten a few morsels she felt faint; she attempted to rise from the table, but her legs would not support her and she fell to the floor senseless.

At this moment the Kazi heard noises outside the door and was at once aghast at what he had done. What should he do to conceal the unconscious lady so that no one should discover his guilt? He thought of the vault where he kept his money and valuables. Only he knew of this vault. Quickly he thrust the merchant's lady into the vault and then went out to find that his wife and family had returned.

The Kazi spoke sharply to his wife. "Why did you go out and leave the house empty?" he asked.

"I left the wife of the merchant to take care of the

place," replied his wife.

"But it is two hours since I came home," argued the Kazi, "and there has been no one in the house. How foolish to trust a stranger! She may have taken some of our valuables with her."

The Kazi's family were astounded at his words, for they all knew that the merchant's wife was a good and honest person, but they could not imagine what had become of her.

Just as this conversation was going on, the merchant, who had that very day returned from Hindustan, was making his way to the Kazi's house to enquire for his wife. To his great surprise the Kazi told him his wife was not there. "It is some time since your wife left my house," said the Kazi, "without giving notice or asking permission."

"Oh come, Kazi, I am weary and anxious," replied the merchant, "this is no time for jesting. Give me back my wife, please."

The Kazi swore that he was in earnest, but the merchant said: "I know my wife too well to believe she was capable of behaving like that. There must be something behind all this."

At this the Kazi appeared angry and said: "It is I who ought to be offended, you foolish man. Why do you come here insulting me and talking nonsense? Go and find your wife yourself!"

The merchant was devoted to his wife. He had been longing to see her after his absence and he was now distressed and bewildered beyond measure. He hurried straightway to the Sultan and, making his obeisance, laid his complaint before him.

"O exalted and happy monarch," he began, "may happiness be the servant of your palace! The Kazi of this city has done me a great injustice. I beg to be allowed to explain what that mean-spirited wretch has done."

The Sultan signified that he was prepared to listen

to the merchant's complaint. And so the merchant began:

"I am a native of Aderbaijan, and the fame of the justice and protection which the poor obtain at the hands of your Majesty induced me to settle in this country. For some years now I have lived in the shadow of the Sultan's protection. I had a beautiful and modest wife, and as I had business in Hindustan, I left her for one year in the care of the Kazi. Now that I have returned from my journey, the Kazi refuses to give me back my wife."

The Sultan ordered the Kazi to be brought before him, and when he appeared the Sultan asked him what he had to say regarding the complaint the merchant had brought against him.

"Your Majesty!" said the Kazi, "May the light of your welfare always shine brightly and may your enemies ever be confounded! This man did indeed entrust his wife to me. But it is now nearly three months since she left my house without a word. She has not come back and we have failed to discover any trace of her."

"My wife would never do such a thing!" cried the merchant. "I do not believe the Kazi's story."

"Where are the witnesses?" asked the Sultan. The Kazi replied that several neighbours could support his story. He wrote down the names of a number of rascals whom he had bribed to give evidence in his favour. The Sultan commanded that the witnesses should be brought in, and they accordingly confirmed all that the Kazi had said. The Sultan then turned to the merchant and said: "The Kazi's statement has been confirmed by witnesses. Your complaint, therefore, falls to the ground."

Bitterly disappointed, the merchant went away.

Now the Sultan was in the habit of walking about the bazaars and streets of the city in disguise and mixing among the people so that he could learn at

first hand what they thought of their ruler. That same night he left his palace to take one of these walks. He chanced to pass near the door of a shop where a group of boys were playing the game of "The King and his Vizier". One of the boys was made king and said to the others: "I am king and you are all under my authority. You must obey all my commands."

"If you make unjust decisions like Sultan Mahmud," said another boy, "you will soon be deposed."

"And what injustice has Sultan Mahmud done?" asked the boy-king.

"Today the affair of the merchant came before the Sultan," answered the other boy. "This merchant had entrusted his wife to the keeping of the Kazi and he hid her in his own house. The Sultan called for witnesses and the Kazi won the case by producing witnesses whom he had previously bribed. It is a great pity that the dealing of justice should be in the hands of people who don't know the difference between right and wrong. If I had been in the Sultan's place I would soon have known what Kazi's witnesses were worth."

The Sultan sighed as he listened to this conversation and as he made his way back to his palace, his mind was troubled. Next morning, as soon as it was daylight, he sent a servant to bring to him the boy who had found fault with his judgement. The boy, greatly wondering what was in store for him, was led before the Sultan, who, however, received him kindly.

"Today," said the Sultan, "you are going to be my lieutenant. You will stay by me from morning till evening and you will pronounce judgement in the cases that come before me as you think fit."

Then the Sultan asked the Chamberlain to call the merchant to repeat his complaint against the Kazi, and the merchant, having been brought into court, did so. Next, the Kazi and his witnesses were summoned, and just as the Kazi was about to sit down

the boy said:

"Ho, Master Kazi, the leading-strings<sup>of</sup> of justice and the power of tying and untying knotty points of law have long been in your hands. How, then, do you seem to be so ignorant of legal customs? It is the rule that you should stand over there, on equal terms with your accuser, until the decision of the court is made known."

The Kazi went and stood by the merchant and again asserted that the merchant's wife had left his house three months before.

"Have you any witnesses?" asked the boy.

The Kazi pointed to his followers. "Here are the witnesses," he said. The boy called one of them to him and asked him quietly whether he had seen the woman. The witness said he had. The boy then asked him what distinguishing marks she had on her face or person, whereupon the witness became embarrassed and said: "She has a mole on her forehead; one of her teeth is missing; she is of fresh complexion and tall and slender." The boy then asked: "What hour of the day was it when she went away from the Kazi's house?" And the man replied: "It was in the morning." "Remain in this place," said the boy.

The boy then called another witness, who described the woman like this: "She is short and thin; her cheeks are red; she has a mole near her mouth. She left the Kazi's house in the afternoon."

The boy told the man to wait in another corner and then called for a third witness, whose evidence contradicted the other two. He continued to question each witness in turn and they all gave conflicting testimony. Throughout the proceedings the Sultan was sitting beside the boy and heard everything that was said. When he had completed his hearing the boy said:

"Oh, you godless wretches! Why do you give false evidence? I will ask the Sultan to call for the instru-



ments of torture. Perhaps we shall then hear the truth."

As soon as the word "torture" was mentioned all the witnesses admitted that they knew nothing about the woman. They said they were poor fellows and that the Kazi had given them money to say what he wanted them to say. The boy then called the Kazi and asked him what he had to say for himself. By this time the Kazi was trembling but he said that the truth was as he had stated. But the boy said: "Our Kazi is a haughty man. He is too proud to confess the truth and say that he has told a falsehood. Let the instruments of torture be brought to him."

When he heard these words the Kazi trembled even more and shakily confessed the truth. The boy then retired and handed the matter over to the Sultan to settle.

The Sultan was greatly impressed by the boy's intelligence. He ordered that he should be educated in the palace and in due time the boy became one of the Sultan's greatest favourites.

As for the Kazi, he was beheaded and all his property was given to the merchant's wife when she had been released and restored to her husband.

## The Vizier's Son and the Beautiful Slave-girl

WHEN the great and good Haroun al Raschid became Caliph of Baghdad he chose his cousin Zenebi to be King of Balsora. Zenebi naturally wished for a queen, but there was no one whom he deemed worthy of this honour, for the Queen of Balsora had to be not only beautiful but gifted and wise as well. So King Zenebi instructed his vizier to find him a maiden who was perfect not only in charm and beauty but who also excelled in wit and intelligence.

The vizier sought far and wide to find this wonderful maiden and was almost despairing, when one morning a merchant brought a Persian slave-girl to his house. This slave-girl was lovely to look upon, and great was the vizier's joy when he discovered that she was also exceptionally gifted. He thereupon installed her in his house, and thinking that his search might at last be at an end, prepared to present her to the King.

But the vizier had a son called Nouredin, and not surprisingly Nouredin fell deeply in love with the girl immediately he saw her. She too was at once attracted by the handsome youth, and when the time came for the vizier to lead the girl to the royal palace,

he found to his dismay that Noureddin could not bear the thought of being parted from her.

The vizier was greatly upset to see his plans thus going astray. More, he was terrified at what the King might do if he found out that when, after all the long searches, the ideal queen for him had been found, he had been at the last moment deprived of this long-awaited joy by the son of his vizier. Many and long were the sleepless nights the vizier endured while he deliberated what his next move should be.

But so great and manifest was Noureddin's love for the beautiful Persian maiden that at length the vizier felt he could do no other than give his consent to their marriage. Their joy at this decision was unbounded and the vizier felt that he had acted rightly.

As time wore on, however, it became more and more difficult for the vizier to placate the King and to explain his persistent failure to find the perfect queen. Try as he might to point out how rare it was to find charm and beauty and wisdom combined in one young woman, the King was becoming impatient and angry and his anger and impatience led him to enquire among the courtiers as to how diligently the vizier had applied himself to his appointed task. It was in the course of these enquiries that the King learned that just such a perfect maiden had been introduced into the vizier's house, that she had found favour with the vizier's son, Noureddin, and that he had married her. On hearing this the anger of King Zenebi knew no bounds and he at once ordered that the young people be brought before him. Clearly he intended to bring about the death of Noureddin and to claim the lovely maiden for himself.

Fortunately for Noureddin, a friend of his was present when the command was given and he at once hastened from the palace to warn the vizier's son. There was nothing for Noureddin and his beautiful bride to do but to flee from Balsora and they board-

ed a ship that was sailing for Baghdad.

Now Nouredin and his lovely bride had never been to Baghdad before and when they disembarked in the great and renowned city they did not know what they should do or where they could rest or stay. For some hours they wandered about the crowded streets, and when, as evening approached, they began to feel tired, they saw a charming gateway leading into a quiet, beautiful garden. Nouredin led his bride through the gateway and towards a cool fountain. There they rested and, as weariness overcame them, they fell asleep.

As darkness was falling, they were awakened by an old man, and Nouredin at once made his apologies for their intrusion in the quiet garden.

"Pray pardon us for falling asleep here," he said. "We are strangers in Baghdad and we walked about the city until we were tired. We could find no place to rest until we came upon this beautiful garden. Oh, how fortunate you are to own such a lovely place."

Now the garden was in fact a pleasure-ground of the great Caliph Haroun al Raschid and the old man was one of the gardeners, but it filled him with such pride and pleasure to be taken for the owner that he at once offered to show the visitors round the splendours of the place.

In the middle of the garden, and right opposite the royal palace, stood a lordly pleasure-house approached by a golden staircase. The old man led the couple up these fabulous steps and into a great hall built of jasper and adorned with rich treasures.

Nouredin's heart leapt at the sight of so much beauty and splendour and was warmed by the kindness of the old man. "Please allow me," he said, "to give a banquet this evening in this beautiful apartment." And, handing the old man a bag of gold, he added: "Pray instruct your slaves to bring meat and fruit and wine for the repast."



There they rested and, as weariness overcame them, they fell asleep.

The old man took the gold and ran to the bazaar. There he bought rich meats, fruits and wines and hurried back with them to the pleasure-house.

There were no less than eighty windows in the great hall and so happy were Noureddin and his beautiful bride at the prospect of the festive night before them that they lit every one of the exquisite lamps that hung before the eighty windows. Then Noureddin, the beautiful Persian maiden and the old man sat down to enjoy the feast.

Now it will be remembered that the pleasure-house stood in the middle of the garden and right opposite the royal palace. It so happened that the Caliph looked out from his palace and was much surprised to see every one of the eighty windows illuminated, as if a great festival were in progress. He did not at once send a courtier to investigate, as any other ruler might have done, but determined to go himself to see what was afoot. To this end he retired to his private apartments and robed himself as a beggar and, thus disguised, he made his way across the garden towards the pleasure-house. As he approached the golden staircase he heard the beautiful girl singing to the accompaniment of a lute. The sound was so sweet that he paused and listened awhile and then fell to wondering how, disguised as a beggar, he could approach the lovely singer and watch her as he listened to her song. While he was deep in thought the Caliph espied a poacher fishing in the stream that flowed through the garden. He went up to the man as a hungry beggar might approach a fisherman and said :

"Have you caught any fish?"

"I have caught two," replied the man, little knowing that it was the Caliph himself whom he was addressing.

"Then let me buy them of you," said the seeming beggar, "for I have need of food."

The Caliph gave the poacher a coin, picked up the

fish, and holding them in his outstretched hands, mounted the golden staircase and entered the banquet hall. He walked straight to Nouredin and greeted him respectfully

"I see you are holding a feast here," he said. "Pray accept these two fine fish. I have just caught them in the stream."

Nouredin declared that he would be happy to accept the fish if the beggar would first go into the kitchen and fry them. The Caliph, greatly enjoying his little subterfuge, retired to the kitchen, fried the fish and returned to serve the company with them.

"Upon my word," said Nouredin, "I have never tasted better fish in my life. Here, my friend, take this small gift. You have served us well with your fish and your frying." And he gave the Caliph a handful of gold.

The Caliph accepted the gold and then begged to be allowed to ask Nouredin a favour. "I should be happy indeed," he said, "if I could be permitted to stay here awhile and listen to the singing of your beautiful wife."

And so the beautiful Persain girl took up her lute and began again to sing. And the Caliph sat down with Nouredin and the gardener and listened enthralled; and in between the songs they conversed and Nouredin told the stranger of the events which had led up to his flight to Baghdad. The Caliph listened intently and when Nouredin had finished his tale he told him that he was indeed Haroun al Raschid, the very one who had put Zenebi on the throne.

On the following day the Caliph of Baghdad sent a letter to his cousin Zenebi, expressing his displeasure at his conduct and ordering him at once to leave the throne.

And who were to be the new King and Queen of Balsora ? None other than the vizier's son, Nouredin, and the beautiful Persian slave-girl whom he had loved and married.

## XXII

### The Greedy Servant and His Lust for Gold

ONCE upon a time, long ago in the reign of the great Haroun al Raschid, Caliph of Baghdad, there lived in that city a man called Hassan. He was a servant of the palace and was well paid for his work, but he was a miserly man and he begrudged even the money he had to spend on the necessities of life. He and his wife, Fatima, lived in a miserable hovel, wore ragged clothes and ate the sort of food which even a stray dog might scorn. Their one pleasure in life was to see their hoard of gold grow year by year and their favourite evening's entertainment was to sit on the floor of their wretched abode and count out their gold pieces. And the heavier the sacks of gold pieces weighed the more greedy did Hassan and Fatima become, and their meanness reached such a pitch that they could no longer bear to spend even the little they had been spending on food.

On day when Hassan was at work and Fatima was setting out to the bazaar to do her marketing a wicked plan took shape in her mind. She would tell the shopkeepers that Hassan had been unjustly thrown into prison, that she was now all alone in the world and had no money. The bazaar people would then take





Their one pleasure in life was to see their hoard of gold grow year  
by year.

pity on her and give her what she needed without payment.

The shopkeepers were astounded at her story, for they knew the Caliph to be a just ruler, but Fatima presented such a pitiable figure that they felt sorry for her and gave her what she wanted.

That night Hassan and Fatima sat down to their supper with renewed glee, for the food had cost them nothing and a few more coins could be added to their treasure.

Fatima continued for some days with her subterfuge and the good-hearted traders were now not only giving her food but discussing between themselves how they might intercede with the Caliph on Fatima's behalf.

"We will assuredly get some news of your poor husband, if nothing else," they said, "and who knows, if you will repeat to us what happened, we may be able to secure his release."

But Fatima lifted her arms and wept. "I beg of you," she wailed, "let no sound of this reach the Caliph's ears. It will only make matters worse."

"Then," said the shopkeepers, "you should appeal to your relatives to help you. You cannot go on any longer like this."

Fearing that if she persisted the traders in the bazaar would become suspicious, Fatima sought out her various relatives. She and Hassan had lived so meanly for such a long time that they had made no contact whatever with other members of their families, but now, goaded on by sheer greed, Fatima went to call on them all in turn, repeating the same pitiful story. The wealthy relations gave her money and food in plenty, the poor ones shared with her what little they had, and all expressed astonishment that the renowned Caliph should have treated his servant so unjustly.

Their web of deceit had now become so dense, that

Hassan had to leave the hovel in the early hours of the morning and could not return until darkness enveloped the streets, in case he should be seen by one of the kind people who were helping Fatima under the impression that he was languishing in prison. And when their supplies were exhausted and they had again to face the prospect of spending money on food, Fatima called once more on the relations. Again they helped her, but this time, quite understandably, like the shopkeepers, they urged her to take some steps to see that justice was done.

"We will stand by you and help you," they said, "but this matter must be brought to the Caliph's attention."

"Oh no," wailed Fatima, "not that. If the Caliph hears of this, Hassan will assuredly lose his life. Then all hope will be at an end."

That night, when Hassan had crept home under cover of darkness, he and Fatima discussed what next they should do. Clearly there would be trouble if they tried to get more from the relations. Their greed had made them into beggars. They were next to become thieves.

On the following day Hassan arrived home from the palace with a large ruby hidden in his mouth.

"The Caliph has so many rubies," he said, "he will not miss this one. Take what money you need from our store and replace it with this ruby. We are then no worse off than before."

And so they continued for a further period. Every time Fatima needed money for the day's needs, Hassan would bring home another ruby, and so their wealth continued to grow until they had not only their two sacks of gold, but also a bag of rubies.

"I will now take the rubies to a distant town where I am not known," said Hassan, "and trade them in for gold."

But Fatima would not hear of this. "The long

journey will cost you money," she said. "Here, give me the rubies and I will exchange them one by one in the bazaar. The sellers know that we have rich relations to whom we have been appealing for help. I will say that the rubies come from them."

And Fatima went to the bazaar with the first ruby, told her story and exchanged it. But the Caliph had been missing his rubies and the bazaar-keepers had been asked to report to the palace if any rubies were offered to them in the course of business. The shopkeeper who had traded with Fatima accordingly sent the ruby to the palace where it was identified as one of those missing from the Caliph's store. Soldiers were at once sent from the palace to the home of Hassan and Fatima and there they found the two sacks of gold pieces and the bag of rubies. The two thieves were put in chains and taken before the Caliph.

"You, a servant of the palace, have stolen from the Caliph. For that alone you deserve to be sentenced to death," declared the great Haroun al Raschid. "But you have also taken goods from the kind-hearted tradespeople of the bazaar, for which you could have well afforded to pay, and you have deprived your poor relatives of money and goods they could ill afford. You both deserve to die. But I will be lenient and give you another chance. You shall not be fined or imprisoned or put to death, nor will you be deprived of your treasure. Instead you will leave this palace with your bags of gold tied round your necks and no man, woman or child may give you food, clothes or any other goods in exchange. Now go."

The Caliph then gave orders that any trader in the bazaar or any other person would be severely punished if he took gold from Hassan or Fatima in exchange for any goods whatsoever, even a crumb, and a declaration to this effect was posted up in the bazaar.

At first Hassan and Fatima were too relieved to have been spared their lives and their gold to think

of anything else. But as they made their way back to their hovel the weight of the gold dragged their heads down and pulled painfully on the backs of their necks. And as they struggled along all the people shunned them. There was no food at home, but they could buy nothing. They stopped to drink at the public fountain and picked up some scraps from the roadside, and that is all they had. They were closely followed by four of the Caliph's soldiers, and when they reached their wretched hovel, the soldiers posted themselves at the door and remained there, pacing up and down all night until they were relieved by four more in the morning. And in the morning again there was nothing to eat, and as Hassan and Fatima left their home to go to the fountain to drink and to scavenge for any scraps of food they might find in the streets, they had to have their heavy bags of gold suspended from their necks and remained closely guarded. And the people in the streets and in the bazaar looked at them in horror and kept their distance.

On the third day they felt they could stand it no longer. Still with the heavy bags of gold hung round their necks and still followed closely by their guards they made their way to the palace and begged an audience of the Caliph.

"Take our bags of gold, O Caliph, and do with it what you will," cried Hassan, "but let me work once more as your servant and pay me only with food and warmth and shelter. I ask nothing more."

And the Caliph called his vizier to him and said: "Take one bag of gold and give it to the traders in the bazaar who were deceived, to share it among themselves, and take the other bag of gold and give it to the relations to repay them for the money and goods which were unlawfully received from them. Let Hassan and his wife be decently clothed and housed and let Hassan be reinstated as my servant. And to

Hassan and Fatima he said:

“Gold is of no use except for what it will buy. You have learned your lesson. Now I am giving you a chance to begin a new life.”

## XXIII

### Isfendiyar and the Seven Stages

ONCE when King Gushtasp of Persia was away visiting Rustem, the Great Champion, in far Zabulistan, his kingdom was invaded by Arjasp, a neighbouring sovereign.

Arjasp entered Persia with a large army, killing and pillaging wherever it went, and eventually reaching the capital. Here Arjasp's soldiers seized the two Princesses, King Gushtasp's only daughters, and carried them off to a brazen tower.

The Persian army had attempted to resist but had suffered defeat in every battle. Now seriously alarmed, King Gushtasp hastened back from Zabulistan and summoned his son Prince Isfendiyar to raise a new army and drive the invader from the land.

Isfendiyar was a prince of outstanding valour. He was also profoundly pious and the people loved him and served him with joy. When, therefore, the ineffectual generals who had failed to halt Arjasp's progress had been dismissed and Isfendiyar placed at the head of the army, things at once began to improve and it was not long before Arjasp and his hordes were driven from the land.

King Gushtasp now announced that he would go

into retirement and spend the rest of his days in prayer, and he begged his son Prince Isfendiyar to take the crown and ascend the throne of Persia in his place. But Isfendiyar would not hear of it. "Continue, O noble monarch," he said, "to be the Shelter of the Universe. As for me, your unworthy son, I desire neither thrones nor diadems. My one wish in life is to invade Arjasp in his own kingdom, and to deliver my dear sisters from their captivity."

These words greatly pleased Gushtasp, who fondly embraced his son, told him to start for the territory of Arjasp as soon as he and the soldiers were sufficiently rested.

During the campaign against Arjasp, the Persians had captured a gigantic Demon warrior called Kurugsar, and Isfendiyar promised this creature his liberty if he would help to rescue the poor Princesses.

The Demon explained that there were three roads to the stronghold of Arjasp. The best would take three months, the next two; but the third was only seven stages in length.

"This is by far the shortest way, O noble Prince," said Kurugsar; "but on each day some fearful obstacle must be overcome. Wild beasts of every kind, monstrous dragons, death-dealing enchantresses, and the dread Simurgh all haunt this district; and so full of perils is the path that no mortal has ever passed along it in safety."

Isfendiyar, following the example of mighty Rustem, devoted himself to fervent prayer, and finally announced that, come what might, he would go by the short road. Kurugsar thereupon implored to be left behind, saying that the Prince would never reach the kingdom of Arjasp, and that his expedition would assuredly end in disaster for all concerned. This greatly displeased Isfendiyar, who imagined that the Demon meant to betray him. He therefore ordered him to be bound and taken along by force as guide



to the great army of twelve thousand men which now set out on this journey so full of danger and horror.

As soon as the soldiers had crossed the Persian frontier, they reached a dreary desert, and Kurugsar bade them advance cautiously, because the place was ravaged by two enormous wolves who were larger than elephants, and had poisonous teeth over a foot in length.

The Demon had scarcely spoken when the monsters made their appearance, rushing upon the Persians with indescribable fury, and causing panic among the soldiers. Man after man fell wounded and dying, and it seemed as if the thousands of arrows shot by those who stood firm had no effect at all.

At last, however, Isfendiyar saw his opportunity, and with a blow of his battle-axe cleft open the skull of one gigantic beast, and, after a terrible struggle, managed to pierce the heart of the other with his sword.

Kurugsar was both amazed and displeased at this feat of arms, for he had hoped that the Prince would lose his life in the encounter with the wolves, and that he himself would then have been set free. However, he feigned great joy, and said :

"Now, O royal general, I will accompany you with a light heart, for I see clearly that the gods have bestowed their favour upon you and that they are guiding your steps."

The Demon-guide repeated these same words on the second day, when Isfendiyar, quite unaided, slew a lion and lioness of supernatural size and ferocity. But he warned the young hero that the fearsome Dragon that haunted the third stage, would be a far harder creature to subdue than the wolves and lions. It was a fire-breathing monster, with a mouth so vast that it swallowed men and horses whole, and a roar so appallingly loud that it made the earth vibrate, and caused avalanches of stones to come

tumbling down the sides of the mountains.

Isfendiyar perceived at once that this monster was not to be overcome by ordinary means, but he soon thought of an ingenious plan. He ordered his litter to be brought out. This was a kind of long box, in which he was sometimes carried when travelling. It had a pair of shafts at either end, to which two stout mules were harnessed.

Isfendiyar now commanded his litter to be studded all over with sword-blades, javelins and spear-heads, and when his company reached the country of the Dragon, he got inside it, shut the little door, and somehow managed to guide the mules by means of ropes which he held. He had no easy task to induce the poor animals to approach the monster, which gave a terrific bellow when it saw them, and rushed forward, great flames bursting from its nostrils.

In less than no time this terrible creature had taken mules and litter into its enormous mouth, but it at once repented of its haste. The sword-blades and spear-heads wounded it so cruelly that it spat everything out again in its dying agony. Isfendiyar then leapt out of the litter and finished off the Dragon with his battle-axe, while the mules galloped away quite unhurt, though naturally severely frightened.

The Demon-guide was the only one who was not pleased at Isfendiyar's success, and with a scarcely-concealed sneer he said:

"Tomorrow, royal champion, a harder task than any that you have yet accomplished awaits you. A most beautiful sorceress will appear who can turn herself into any shape she pleases, and in a moment can change this desert into a stormy sea or a lovely garden, according to her caprice. Moreover, she is attended by a huge ghoul of malignant aspect."

"He who puts his trust in the gods need not fear," answered Isfendiyar, and when, on the next day, the beautiful enchantress advanced towards him, he met

guile by guile, and invited her to sit beside him on a pile of silken carpets from the looms of Kashan.

And as they talked, he caught the sorceress suddenly round the waist with his rope and held her fast in a noose, though she turned into different animals, and even into a very aged man who begged for mercy.

"Kill her, as you value your life!" shouted Kurugsar. "She will turn this place into a deep lake and drown us all if you hesitate."

Isfendiyar thereupon slew the enchantress, and had then to do battle with the enormous ghou. The flames which burst forth from this monster were so fierce that they burnt the young Prince badly; but, in spite of all his pain, he persevered and managed to despatch this adversary, thus completing his fourth labour.

"So far success has attended you," remarked the Demon-guide. "But I have many fears as to the result of the morrow! Your way lies over the mountain-pass, where dwells the dread Simurgh, half-bird, half-beast, and as large as the monstrous Dragon."

Isfendiyar, nothing daunted, determined to try the cunning plan that had succeeded so well with the Dragon.

He again ordered the mules to be harnessed to his litter, which was stuck all over with sword-blades and spear-heads, and, getting inside, he went on up the pass, ahead of his army. As soon as the Simurgh espied the litter it swooped down upon it, with beak and claws, intending to carry it off bodily to its nest in the mountains. But the sharp points injured the bird so terribly that Isfendiyar was able to kill it quite easily, and then, amid the cheers of the whole army, he told the Demon-guide that he was ready for whatever might befall on the next stage.

"Do not be too sure of yourself," Kurugsar replied. "Tomorrow you will encounter a fall of snow so heavy that you and your warriors will lose the way, and

a wind so bitter that it will chill all of you to the very heart, thousands perishing from the intense cold. How can you venture to fight against the elements? It is as if you braved the great gods themselves."

These words excited the whole army, which implored Isfendiyar to return. Up to now the soldiers had not been greatly dismayed by any of the perils of the road, as they saw from the first that their brave young general bore the whole brunt of them. But this sixth stage was a very different matter, because everyone would have to share the danger.

The Prince, addressing the army, said that, through the favour of the gods, he had overcome five of the obstacles on the road, therefore he was convinced that the dwellers on high would enable him to pass the last two stages in safety.

"Comrades in arms!" he exclaimed, "I have pledged my honour to deliver my sisters from the brazen fortress. Rather than break my oath I will go alone. Farewell! Return in safety to fair Persia, and tell King Gushtasp that his son did his utmost."

These words made the soldiers ashamed of themselves, and with one voice they said that they would follow Isfendiyar to the death. They had no great reason to repent of their decision, for they reached the shelter of some great caves in the mountains before the storm began. Though it lasted for three days without ceasing, the fervent prayers of the entire army prevailed with the gods, so that on the fourth day the heavens were again clear.

The Demon-guide, however, made one last effort to dissuade Isfendiyar from attempting the seventh stage. He said it lay across a waterless desert, the sands of which were red-hot and would burn up anyone who ventured upon them, and, moreover, discharged such poisonous vapours that even the vultures never dared to hover over them.

But the Prince was not to be daunted, for he and all his men had soaked their boots in the blood of the Simurgh. Isfendiyar had commanded this, knowing that the precaution would enable them to pass through fire unhurt. So in due time the Persians reached the brazen tower, where the poor Princesses were imprisoned, and Isfendiyar enquired of the Demon the best way of entering the fortress.

"May you never succeed in your attempt!" replied the Demon in a burst of rage. "May the Demons repulse your onslaught, and drive you into the desert to perish miserably! Curses be on my head that I have shown you the way so far!"

On this, Isfendiyar immediately slew Kurugsar, and then approached the castle cautiously to try to discover its weak points. As it was made entirely of brass, he saw that he must use guile rather than force, especially when he heard that it had ample food and water and was garrisoned by thousands of warriors.

He therefore loaded twenty camels with rich merchandise, and eighty with two big chests apiece, in which he stowed his picked warriors. A hundred soldiers, clad in blue cotton shirts and full trousers and felt skull-caps, acted the part of camel-drivers, keeping their weapons carefully hidden, while the Prince and his lieutenants appeared as merchants.

King Arjasp at once allowed this caravan to be admitted, and was so delighted with the splendid gifts which Isfendiyar presented to him that he gave the merchants leave to visit the palace whenever they liked.

Isfendiyar soon found his poor sisters, who were being forced to do all kinds of rough work in King Arjasp's kitchens. He was afraid to reveal himself to them, lest they should, in their joy, betray him, and when they addressed the supposed merchant with a glad cry of welcome, and asked whether he knew if there was a plan afoot in Persia for their rescue, he replied in a feigned voice.

But the elder Princess recognised him at once and he was obliged to tell them of his plan, at the same time urging them to continue their work as usual in order not to excite suspicion.

That night he invited the King and his warriors to a grand banquet, saying that when darkness came on he would light a huge bonfire which would give as much illumination as a thousand torches. He said this because he had arranged with his men that when they saw flames rising from the fortress they were to attack the tower without delay.

Everything happened exactly as planned. The King and his nobles drank so much of the strong Persian wine that they became sleepy, and when the Prince had released his eighty warriors from the chests, and had lit the bonfire, he opened the gate of the fortress to the Persian soldiers lying in wait outside.

After a long fight, in which Arjasp and his entire army were routed, Isfendiyar with his sisters and soldiers returned by the Seven Stages, now a perfectly safe road, to Persia, where King Gushtasp received them with much honour.

## XXIV

### The Sultan and the Pious Baker

ONCE upon a time there was a Sultan who liked occasionally to dress as a dervish or holy beggar and, when the sun had gone down, to wander in the city and mingle unrecognized with his subjects. One evening, when he was walking thus through the bazaar, carrying his begging-bowl, he happened to pass a baker's shop from which he heard coming sounds of fervent prayer. He stopped and looked in, and there he saw the baker, standing by his scales and repeating aloud: "What God has willed, so be it. God's will be done." The Sultan was most impressed by the man's piety and said to himself: "Either this fellow is one of the most devout of my subjects and deserves to be honoured, or he is the worst dissembler I have ever encountered and should suffer. I will put his trust in God to the test."

The Sultan went up to the baker and said: "I need a loaf of bread but have no money with which to pay for it. Pray give me the loaf and take this ring as a pledge; it is worth two thousand tumans." And so saying the Sultan removed a valuable ring from his finger and passed it to the baker, who handed him the loaf and put the ring in the till.

The Sultan then returned to his palace and told his vizier what he had done. "And now," said the Sultan, "I command you to get the ring back from the baker without the baker knowing and return it to me."

On the following morning the vizier went into the bazaar accompanied by two servants, announcing that he was a government official and had come to test all the traders' weights and scales to ensure that the people were getting fair measure and were not being defrauded. The three men went from shop to shop carrying out their pretended mission until they arrived at the shop of the pious baker. He respectfully made way for the so-called inspector and allowed him to make the necessary tests. The vizier then said: "The weights and scales in your shop are in order. I now require to test the scales upon which you weigh the flour."

"Certainly," said the baker. "They are behind the shop in the bakehouse," and he made to lead the way.

"Kindly bring them to me here," ordered the vizier, and the baker departed.

No sooner had the baker turned his back than the vizier opened the till and after searching rapidly among the coins which were there he found the Sultan's ring. He quickly secreted this on his person and the baker returned with his flour scales, quite unsuspecting.

Highly delighted with the easy success of his mission, the vizier hurried back to the palace, and returned the ring to the Sultan, who replaced it upon his finger. The Sultan then despatched one of his servants to bring the baker to him.

When the baker was brought before the Sultan, the ruler said: "Last evening, after sundown, I came to your shop disguised as a dervish and bought from you a loaf of bread, giving my ring to you as a pledge. Here now is the money for the loaf. Please take it and return to me my ring."



"Your Majesty," said the poor bewildered baker, "it grieves me to tell you that the ring has vanished from my till."

"Vanished?" cried the Sultan. "How could it vanish? Either you return my ring to me at once or pay me what it is worth. That ring, as you know, is worth two thousand tumans."

The baker, in great distress, begged the Sultan to allow him a few days in which to search for the ring and make enquiries as to what could have happened to it.

"You shall have ten days in which to produce it," said the Sultan. "But if my ring is not returned to me within ten days, you must either give me its value in money or face execution."

"So be it," said the unfortunate baker, and returned to his home to pray.

"What God has willed, so be it. God's will be done," he said, over and over again.

Now on the eighth day of the baker's respite, the Sultan happened to be out hunting. Ready for rest and refreshment, the Sultan reined in his horse by a stream and dismounted. He then knelt on the grass and plunged his hands into the cool water. As he did this, to his dismay his ring slipped from his finger and was carried away by the current. Further down the stream a man was fishing and when he had got a good catch he closed his basket and made for the bazaar to sell his wares.

The baker, who by now was convinced that he faced certain execution at the hands of the Sultan, heard the fisherman calling his wares and said to his wife: "Come, let us cheer ourselves with a good meal. Here is a man selling fresh fish, just caught, let us eat and enjoy it."

The baker accordingly bought two large fish and handed them to his wife to cook for supper. She laid them on a board and cut them open to clean them

and to her astonishment in the belly of the larger of the two fishes she found a magnificent ring. In great excitement she called her husband, who at once saw that it was the very ring which the Sultan had handed to him.

"God be praised !" cried the baker. and on the following day hastened to the palace and handed the ring to the Sultan.

The Sultan, when his eyes beheld the ring, so miraculously returned to him, was stricken with awe and wonder. He needed no further proof of the baker's sincerity than this astounding evidence of God's care for him and ordered that he should at once be clothed in a robe of honour.

In the time that followed, the baker, who had so impressed the Sultan with his piety, became one of the court favourites.

## The Three Wicked Women

ONCE upon a time there were three cunning, deceitful women. One was a Kazi's or magistrate's wife, the second was the wife of a bazaar-master and the third was the wife of the superintendent of police. These three wicked women were constantly disturbing the peace of others by their trickery.

One day the three of them met at the public bath, and being three of a kind they got on famously together, and greatly enjoyed each other's company. Now, to these three, as to many other Persian ladies, the public bath was a favourite place of entertainment and amusement. They often arranged to meet each other there and frequently spent seven or eight hours together in the carpeted saloon, telling stories, eating sweets, dyeing their hair and eyebrows and painting their bodies with all sorts of fantastic patterns, such as the figures of trees and birds, and the sun, moon and stars.

While they were in the dressing-room all three of them at the same moment espied a most beautiful ring set with a gem the splendour of which surpassed anything they could have imagined. Now each of the three women wanted the ring, but as they had all seen it at

the same time they could not agree as to who should have it. They argued and argued about it until at length the mother of the bathman, an old hag who had for years worked together with a sorceress and had learned all sorts of tricks from her, stepped forward and said:

"I am a woman who has seen the world and I have come upon this sort of thing before. I have an idea, and if you will listen to me your difficulty will be solved. Now," the wily old woman went on, "I am an honest woman and you may safely leave the ring with me. You shall, each of you, go and play a trick upon your husbands and I will decide which husband has been most thoroughly deceived. The wife who wins shall have the ring."

The three agreed and gave up the ring to the old woman. They then completed their toilet and departed to their own homes, the wife of the Kazi having first said that she would be the one to begin the competition.

### *The Trick of the Kazi's Wife*

It so happened that a carpenter who was a neighbour of the Kazi greatly admired the Kazi's wife. But as the object of his love was out of reach, he was stricken with grief and longing. Now the Kazi's wife realized this, although of course she never took any notice of the carpenter, so she called her slave-girl to her and said: "There is a little business with which I need your help. If you will cheerfully do what I ask of you, you will receive not only a reward of money, but also gifts that will rejoice your heart."

And the girl replied: "I will do whatever my mistress desires."

The wife of the Kazi went on: "I want you to go, without anyone seeing you, to the house of the carpenter and to tell him that the flame of his love has caught my heart afire; that I am aware he has suf-

ferred because of my unkindness and that I am truly sorry and want to make amends. If therefore he will dig an underground passage between his house and this one, I shall be able to go and see him without anyone knowing."

The slave-girl duly delivered the message to the carpenter, who was so beside himself with joy at what he heard that he presented the girl with a thousand gold pieces and gave her a message for her mistress that he would do as she bade and would indeed follow her to the ends of the earth, so full of love for her was he.

The carpenter faithfully dug a spacious passage between the two houses and the lady duly visited him by this means. At the sight of her coming to him thus, all sadness departed from the carpenter's heart, and to his further surprise and joy the lady said: "I shall come again at the same time tomorrow and you must bring the Kazi to marry me to you."

Next morning, when the Kazi had gone as usual to the court of justice, his wife made her way into the house of the carpenter. The carpenter, all grief and longing at an end, dressed himself in his brightest clothes and went to the court to call on the Kazi.

"O Kazi," he began, "giver of law and pillar of the affairs of men, there is no matter of importance that can be arranged without your help."

The Kazi rightly supposed that the man had come on business, and thinking that it might be something profitable he greeted him cordially. "Welcome," he called. "May the mercy of God rest upon you. Stay awhile and refresh yourself while you tell me your business."

"Today, O Kazi," replied the carpenter, "I am a bridegroom, and my bride is waiting in the house. The stars are right for a marriage and I request your lordship to perform the ceremony without delay."

Upon hearing that it was a wedding for which his

services were required, the Kazi at once agreed to go with the carpenter without delay. He briskly entered the carpenter's house, but when his eyes lighted upon the bride he began to have misgivings and paused, for was not the lady his own wife? However, he tried to hide his discomfiture, saying: "This is a most extraordinary thing. Never before in my life have I seen two people so alike." And once more he became lost in thought.

"But my lord," exclaimed the carpenter, "the time is passing. Please do not delay."

Once more the Kazi looked at the lady and then suddenly stood and made to leave the room. The carpenter felt bewildered and worried.

"O Kazi, where are you going?" he asked.

"My good fellow," replied the Kazi, "I have left my book of prayer in my house. There is a prayer which must be recited before a marriage to make sure of the happiness of the newly married couple." And he walked off into his own house.

While he was on his way, however, his wife slipped along the secret passage, entered her room and lay down on her bed. When the Kazi arrived on the scene and found his wife resting thus he could not understand how such a thought could have entered his head.

"May God forgive me for giving way to this strange suspicion!" he exclaimed.

His wife, hearing this, called to her slave-girl:

"Did I not tell you that I wanted to rest and that no one was to be allowed to disturb me?" she asked crossly.

"It is I, beloved, and no stranger," said the Kazi. "Pray forgive me for having harboured evil suspicions about you."

"You must be mad," replied his wife.

The Kazi thereupon returned to the house of the carpenter, but once more his wife had gone before him and was seated in her former place when he

arrived on the scene. As soon as he looked at her the old suspicions returned:

"O Lord," he called, "I am on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand I am called to perform the ceremony without delay but something urges me to defer it."

"My lord Kazi," said the carpenter impatiently, "I see you are hesitating. I will give you these thousand gold pieces to hasten the proceedings because time is short."

When the Kazi's eyes lighted on the money he took it at once from the carpenter, stuffed it in his pocket and began to say the opening words of the marriage ceremony. But just when he arrived at the words "I marry" he noticed a mole on the corner of his wife's lip which was very familiar to him. All his uneasiness



All his uneasiness returned and he began to hesitate again.

returned and he began to hesitate again. The carpenter again became impatient.

"O Kazi," he cried, "why do you still delay?"

The Kazi smiled and answered: "I must carefully consider what I do lest I commit a fault that cannot be undone. Why are you in such haste? Confusion and impatience do not help along the affairs of this world. You remind me of the shepherd who, one day while he was tending his flock, became very thirsty. So he left his sheep and made his way to a nearby village to look for water. On his way there he saw a schoolmaster sitting beneath a tree teaching a group of boys. He watched them for a while and noted that the schoolmaster would tell the boys to repeat a phrase after him and the boys would all instantly and humbly obey, sitting there quietly repeating their lessons after their teacher. The shepherd was most impressed and thought what an easy life the schoolmaster had compared with his own. He decided he would much rather teach a group of young boys than spend his days out in the fields tending a lot of sheep. So he went up to the schoolmaster and said: 'I should very much like to learn your trade. Please teach it to me.' The schoolmaster looked at the shepherd and saw at a glance that he was a rough, ignorant fellow of no great intelligence. However, he took a piece of paper, wrote the alphabet on it and said to the shepherd: 'Please sit down and read that.' But the shepherd was disappointed and eyed the large important-looking books which the boys were using. 'Why do you give me these few characters on this piece of paper?' he asked the schoolmaster. 'I would prefer to learn from these big books.' 'But,' said the schoolmaster, 'if you cannot read at all you must first learn the alphabet.' 'I have no time to sit here learning the alphabet,' replied the shepherd. 'Please teach me the books quickly, for my flock even at this moment is wandering about without a shepherd and I must get



back to them.' The schoolmaster, of course, could only smile and send the shepherd on his way.

"So you see, carpenter," continued the Kazi, "things are not always as simple as they seem to those who do not understand. Furthermore, I have on my mind a problem that arose yesterday in the course of my work: a rich man died and his property has to be equally divided among thirty-two heirs. That has to be worked out and arranged. I have many affairs to consider and not only yours."

The Kazi was of course talking away like this just to delay matters, for every time he glanced at the lady who was to be the carpenter's bride, he became more and more uneasy. Then he said:

"To perform a marriage is a very important act and the religious laws must be strictly obeyed. Now it is necessary that I cleanse myself thoroughly before performing the ceremony and for that purpose I must return again to my own house."

"But," said the carpenter, "why do you not wash yourself here in my house? I will make everything ready for you."

"No," said the Kazi, "the arrangements for purification are all ready in my house, and furthermore, I never wash in strange water."

With this latest invented excuse the Kazi left the carpenter to return to his own house. But his wife slipped through the passage and when he entered her room he found her seated there, quietly reading a book.

"May God forgive me!" he exclaimed.

His wife looked up in amazement and said: "What *is* the matter with you? Have you suddenly gone mad? You keep going and coming back again and talking to yourself. You should see a doctor. I am beginning to wonder if I ought to stay in the house with you!"

"My good and innocent wife," said the Kazi, "I

have today harboured evil suspicions about you and quite groundlessly. Pray forgive me."

"It is sinful to think evil of others without reason," said his wife, "and you will have to make atonement. Give the maid some money which she can distribute among the poor on your behalf."

And the Kazi felt bound to do as he was asked.

Then, however, he took an apple from his pocket and cut it in two. Giving half to his wife, he said: "It is one of the many excellent qualities of apples that they increase love between husband and wife. Take this and eat it. I am now going to the bath."

He then replaced the other half of the apple in his pocket and returned to the house of the carpenter.

As before, his wife had preceded him through the secret passage. When the Kazi arrived he saw the lady seated in her place with, to his amazement, half an apple in her hand. As he stood looking at her in bewilderment, the carpenter began once more to show signs of impatience.

"O Kazi, what does this mean?" he cried. "You come and then you go and then you come again and delay. If you for some reason do not want to perform this marriage ceremony I will summon another lawyer to conduct the affair. If it is a question of money and my thousand dinars is not enough for you, pray accept another five hundred."

At the mention of more money, the Kazi's doubts were momentarily overcome by his natural greed. "The devil is playing a trick on me," he thought. "I will marry the pair."

Then once again he looked at the lady and saw that she was wearing the ruby necklace for which he had paid three thousand dinars. He shook his head in utter bewilderment and said to himself: "What has come over me? Am I seeing things which are not there?" And to make matters even worse for him the carpenter now said:

"At last I see what the trouble is. You want to win this lady for yourself. Every time I look at you, you are eyeing her and searching her face for some sign of response. Come let us clear the matter once and for all. We will ask the lady what her own wishes are."

The Kazi, however, was thinking to himself that as the carpenter was a simple and ignorant man he would not know whether the Kazi was reciting the true marriage ceremony or not, so he seated himself and recited ceremoniously:

"Iazghara, Iajargara, Aftanys Salanka, Dama Talkuvara."

Then turning to the carpenter, he said to him: "Now you must say 'I agree'."

But the carpenter had often heard the marriage ceremony recited and he knew at once that this was not it. Coming upon all the previous postponements, this further delay made him very angry indeed.

"Oh come, Kazi," he said, "I have paid you one thousand five hundred dinars to marry me as the grand people are married and yet you treat me as if I were a poor fool. Please either perform the ceremony properly or return the money to me forthwith."

"You have very grand ideas for a working man," answered the Kazi. "The words I have just recited are the very same words I used when marrying Mullah Abdullah who follows his trade in the bazaar, and yet you must have nothing less than the ceremony used for grandees. You really make me tired."

"I may be a simple working man," replied the carpenter with some heat, "but I have high ambitions. And I am far from ignorant."

"How can you prove it?" asked the Kazi.

"Well," said the carpenter, "I know the story of the Sun and the Moon; I have also heard the tale of Sayful-Muluk. And what is more, my father used to pass by the school-house every day on his way to

work." He said this as if he thought he could call himself educated because his father had passed by the school-house every day, which greatly amused the Kazi. It was therefore with great sarcasm that he said:

"Really, carpenter, you surprise me. I did not realise that you had reached such heights of learning."

But the carpenter took the compliment quite seriously and said: "Well then, there is now no further excuse for you to delay."

The Kazi made once more to start the marriage ceremony, but then his eye again lighted on the half apple in the lady's hand and he cried: "Give me that apple!" and took it from her. He took the other half apple from his pocket, and placing the two together, found they fitted perfectly.

The carpenter threw his hands in the air. "In heaven's name, Kazi, what are you doing now?" he cried.

"What I have done with the apple signifies that there will be great love between you," the Kazi replied. He then rose and made once more to return to his house to verify matters with his wife, when the lady rose to her feet and said:

"Am I to be kept here any longer to be made into a laughing-stock? I think the Kazi must be mad. Never in my life have I known such goings on."

The Kazi, however, hurried off to his house where his wife met him with the words: "I think you must be mad, you have such a strange look in your eyes."

"Oh God," thought the Kazi, "the other woman thought I was mad." And aloud he said: "Tell me, what is happening to me?"

"By the look of you," replied his wife, "you remind me of a sad case of which I heard. This poor man became quite demented and could not distinguish one person from another. He finally went blind. And it was all due to eating unwisely."

"Oh woe," wailed the Kazi. "Now I remember

well. Some days ago I was with the superintendent of police in the house of an Armenian who had died. We had to make a list of all his property. His family gave us supper. The food was delicious and I was hungry. Doubtless I ate unwisely."

Again the Kazi returned to the carpenter's house and again found the lady sitting there. He looked at her intently and she exclaimed: "This impudent Kazi will keep staring at me. I have had enough of him. Either he goes or I go."

"Honourable lady," said the Kazi, "in all matters of importance, and certainly a marriage is such a matter, it does well to be thoughtful and not to hurry unduly."

"I am worn out with your talkativeness and foolhardiness!" shouted the carpenter angrily. "Go now! You even make me lose all wish to be married." And as he said this, they heard the voice of the muezzin, calling the people to prayer. "You see," said the carpenter. "The morning has passed with your nonsense; it is already midday. The favourable hour for the marriage has passed."

"Now listen," said the Kazi. "You are a carpenter and know how to handle a saw; you can make windows and doors—but what do you know about the sun and the moon and the stars? How do you know what is the favourable hour and what is not?" And taking an almanac from his pocket the Kazi added: "The moon yesterday entered the sign of the balance and travelled so fast that she is tired and is resting until tomorrow. Therefore every hour until tomorrow is favourable for a wedding. I will return to my house for a moment as my eyes are troubling me and I cannot see the book clearly. I will bathe them and then return."

But the carpenter seized the Kazi on the one side and the lady grasped him on the other and both said: "You shall not go until you have performed the marriage ceremony."

"Let me go, let me go," cried the Kazi, "or I will have both of you punished!"

"A curse be on your head if you do us the least harm!" retorted the carpenter.

The Kazi, now at his wits' end, felt there was nothing to do but to marry the carpenter and the lady, so murmuring a prayer that God would shield him from evil, he tied the knot.

It was the custom for the lady to kiss the hand of the Kazi after the ceremony and she stepped forward to do so. The Kazi, still plagued with the thought that the lady was indeed his wife, decided he would mark her so that he could afterwards identify her. He therefore gave her a mighty blow on the cheek with his clenched fist and ran off into his own house. There he found his wife covering her face with her hands and bewailing the fact that her husband had gone mad. The maids drove him out into the street and from there he was led to a madhouse.

The Kazi's wife thought that she had now gone as far as she could go with trickery and deceit. She reported to her friends what she had done and told them it was now their turn to display their cunning.

### *The Trick of the Bazaar-Master's Wife*

It was now the turn of the bazaar-master's wife to play a trick on her husband, and this lady was so cunning that even Satan himself could have taken lessons from her. She had an old nurse who was also well practised in all the arts of deceit and she decided to enlist her aid. So she called the old woman to her and proceeded to flatter her.

"O kind and beloved old nurse," she began, "if I am now able to cheat and deceive it is because you have taught me your clever tricks. My husband has displeased me and I wish to play a trick on him, but he is so wise and far-seeing that I could not hope to

succeed without your help. Pray assist me to unseat this proud man from his high horse."

"My lovely little bird," replied the old nurse, "my heart longs to be of service to you."

"I have long known that the son of the banker is in love with me," continued the lady, "but I have given him no encouragement. I now want you to go to him and give him this message. I want you to tell him that I have been troubled by bad dreams which I am convinced have come to me because of my unkindness to him. I now regret this and wish to put matters right with him. The bazaar-master will be busily engaged for the next five hours and during this time I should like the banker's son to put on a woman's veil and to come to the house with wine and sweetmeats so that we may have a little entertainment undisturbed."

The nurse had just left the house to call on the banker's son when the bazaar-master arrived. "Dear husband," said the lady, "I am expecting a visit from a friend whom I met at the bath. Please send in the necessary wines and sweetmeats for a handsome entertainment and see that we remain undisturbed. I wish to receive her with all honour and make a fine impression." And to this the bazaar-master readily agreed.

The banker's son was delighted with the message he received from the old nurse. He arrayed himself in costly garments and then covered himself with a large veil. Carrying a flask of red wine and a basket of the choicest sweetmeats he made his way full of joyful expectation to the house of the bazaar-master's wife. She was awaiting her visitor in the hall and gave him a splendid welcome. Then she led him into an inner room, tenderly removing his veil and begged his pardon for her former discourtesy. Then, leaving the room, she said: "Rest here awhile. I will go and bring refreshments and musical instruments and we

will enjoy ourselves."

Outside, she said to her maids: "When I go into the room again you must call the bazaar-master and say that his wife is drinking wine and making music with a stranger."

She then returned to the banker's son. It was not long, however, before one of the bazaar-master's servants entered the room, saying his master had sent him to enquire what was going on. The young man at once became afraid; after all, he had entered the house in disguise, and now feared the results of his boldness. The lady thereupon opened a chest and said to the young man: "Jump in here until I know what is happening." And she hurriedly locked the chest.

The door then flew open and in marched the bazaar-master, his eyes aflame with excitement. But his wife greeted him calmly.

"You look disturbed, my love," she said. "Tell me, what is worrying you?"

"I just cannot believe what I have heard," said the bazaar-master, "and I am asking you to tell me the truth."

"The truth is this," replied the lady. "There is a young man who for some time has been showing signs of love towards me, but, mindful of my position, I have given him no encouragement. Now it has occurred to me that pity and kindness are the very bases of our religion and it seems as wrong to me to deny the young man an hour of my companionship as it would be to withhold alms from a beggar. Many people may partake of the fragrance of the rose without diminishing that fragrance, so be not jealous, dear husband. What harm does it do you or me if I treat this young man to a few words of kindness. To give a drop of water to this thirsty man is an insurance against misfortune coming our way and will benefit us both."



The bazaar-master was furious. "I have never heard such nonsense!" he exclaimed.

The lady laughed. "Silly man," she said. "I was only pretending and having a little fun with you. Come into my chamber and see for yourself. There is no one there!" Saying this she led the way in, her husband following. Immediately he entered the room he saw the wine and the sweetmeats laid out as if for a party and espied the young man's garments laid on a chair. Once more he exploded in wrath. "Where is the young man?" he shouted.

"He is in that chest," replied his wife. "Here, take the key and have a look inside."

The bazaar-master took the key and once more the lady burst into peals of laughter. "Another point to me!" she cried delightedly. "Silly man, it is only a game."

"You try my patience too far," retorted the bazaar-master, and throwing down the key he stalked out of the room.

While all this was going on the young man in the chest felt as if he were hovering somewhere between life and death. Now the lady opened the chest and said: "Now dress quickly and leave the house as quietly as you can. How narrowly you have escaped serious trouble!" Fervently thanking God that he had been saved from this awkward situation, the young man fled.

Having played this subtle little trick the bazaar-master's wife told the wife of the superintendent of police that it was now her turn to see what she could do.

### *The Trick of the Wife of the Superintendent of Police*

The wife of the superintendent of police thought long as to how she could trick her husband, and when she had made up her mind she said to him: "I think it would be pleasant if we both had a quiet day at

home tomorrow. I will make some cakes."

"Very well, my dear," replied her husband. "I can think of nothing I would like more."

Now the lady had a servant-boy who was devoted to her and always anxious to please. She called the lad to her and said: "I have a little business which I should like you to do for me," and the boy was only too happy to comply. The lady then gave the servant one thousand dinars and said:

"Go to the monastery which is nearby, give this money to one of the monks and tell him that a prisoner whom the Amir had surrendered to the police escaped last night. Tell the monk that he strongly resembles the escaped prisoner and that the superintendent of police is sending a man to seize him, as he does not want the Amir to know of his failure to keep the man in custody. Tell the monk that you have come to rescue him, for if he stays in the town until morning he will assuredly be captured and doubtless also tortured. Tell him to take the money, to give you his habit and to flee with all speed."

The lad did as he was ordered and returned to the house bearing the monk's habit, which he handed to his mistress.

Next morning the lady set about making her cakes while her husband rested. Into one of the little cakes she put a powerful drug. Then she requested her husband to taste the cake and see if it was to his liking. He bit into it and at once fell into a deep sleep. She then dressed him in the monk's habit and instructed the servant-boy to shave off his beard.

When evening came the lady called her servant and asked him to lift the sleeping superintendent on to his back and carry him to the monastery.

The lad obeyed.

On waking next morning the superintendent of police found his mouth very dry and thinking he was at home he called: "Boy, bring me water!" His call

wakened the other monks and they told him to be quiet and wait for the proper time for food and drink. Hearing this the superintendent of police thought he must be dreaming. He lay quietly on his back gazing at the ceiling and was amazed to see that it was vaulted like a monastery. He then got up and looked in bewilderment at the habit he was wearing. He washed his face and noticed with further astonishment that he no longer possessed a beard or moustache. Thoroughly perplexed, he walked out of the monastery and made his way back to his own house. His wife and her servant were expecting this and were quite ready for him. When he knocked on the door, the servant-boy answered.

"Whom do you seek?" he enquired.

"I wish to enter the house," replied the superintendent of police.

"You are evidently not fully awake," said the servant, "and have taken the wrong road. This is not the monastery. This is the house of the superintendent of police."

"What is this nonsense you are talking?" shouted the superintendent of police. "Out of my way! Let me enter my own house!"

He pushed his way forward, the boy tried to prevent him and they set to and started to fight. At this moment the lady and her slave-girls rushed forward with sticks and stones.

"Would this rascally monk dare in broad daylight to force his way into the house of the superintendent of police?" they shouted. "If my husband were not sick," continued the lady, "he would have you arrested forthwith."

By this time the noise had attracted the whole neighbourhood. A crowd of people gathered in front of the house, and seeing the habited figure trying to push inside they called: "Just look at that rascally monk! What impudence to try to enter the house of

the superintendent of police without permission !”

The crowd grew so large that it eventually numbered five hundred. The poor superintendent of police was chased away from his own door, pursued by all the boys of the town, who pelted him with stones.

He did not stop running until he had reached a village three miles from the town. There he hid himself in a corner of the mosque and in the evenings he went from house to house begging for food. Meanwhile, whenever anyone enquired for the superintendent of police at his house his wife informed the caller that he was ill.

When one month had passed and his beard had grown again the superintendent made his way back to the town. He was so mystified about what had happened that he was afraid to go to his own house but went instead to the monastery. And there one day his wife saw him sitting with a group of monks. She felt the time had now come to bring the trick to an end so she baked a loaf containing the same drug and ordered the slave-boy to go to the monastery when all the monks were asleep and to place the loaf by the head of the superintendent.



The servant-boy carried the sleeping superintendent home on his back.



‘I can hardly describe the strange things I have experienced.’

When the superintendent awoke and found the loaf he supposed it had been put there by a kind companion. He took several bites from it and fell into a deep sleep. The servant-boy, instructed by his mistress, then went to the monastery and carried the sleeping superintendent home on his back.

Next morning the lady dressed her still-sleeping husband in his own clothes and started to make the cakes as she had on the previous occasion. When at length the sleeper began to stir, the lady said:

"O husband, do not sleep away this day we have set aside for enjoyment. Lift your head and see the beautiful sweetmeats I have baked for you."

When the superintendent opened his eyes and looked around him he exclaimed: "God be praised! What has been happening to me?"

"Wife," he continued, "I can hardly describe the strange things I have experienced."

"I have been watching you while you slept," replied his wife. "You have been stirring uneasily. Evidently you have been having bad dreams."

"Bad dreams, indeed!" exclaimed the superintendent. "I have been having the most extraordinary adventures."

"Now calm yourself," said his wife, "you have clearly eaten something which has disagreed with you."

"You are doubtless quite right," said the superintendent. "I was invited last night to the house of sergeant and I fear I must have eaten unwisely. That must have been the cause of all my trouble."

Thus the third of the three deceitful women played her cruel trick upon her poor husband.

Then the three wicked women all went to the bath again as arranged to tell their stories to the old hag and to claim the ring.

But the old hag had played the nastiest trick of all. She had gone away to another country and had taken the ring with her.